Published, June 1 (Plate Rate Established by
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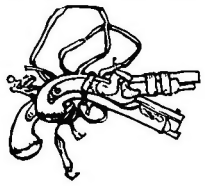

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Adventure Vol. 3 No. 4

Arthur Sullivant Hoffman
Managing Editor

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Issued monthly. Yearly subscription, $1.50 in advance. Single copy, fifteen cents
Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. Canadian postage, 30 cents.

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Published by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

Erman J. Ridgway, President — Ray Brown, Secretary and Treasurer
Spring & Macdougal Streets, New York City
5, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered at the New York Post-office as Second Class Matter

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LOOKING into his own grave was what started him writing. It was in Africa, and it's too long a story to tell here, but the main point is that looking into one's own grave would seem to be worth while. Lots of us would be glad to look into our own graves if we could be sure of staying out of them long enough to write as good stories as this man has come to write since then.

But in his case Africa had been preceded by Asia, the Straits Settlements, Tasmania, and Australia, not to mention Europe. It was only that the freshly dug hole he had escaped made him suddenly realize what a wealth of splendid literary material he had been gathering in his crowded years.

And Talbot Mundy has also that intangible thing called the "story-teller's gift." Read "The Soul of a Regiment" and decide for yourself. Maybe it will make the thrills run up and down your spine. Maybe not. They ran up and down mine when I read it, and an editorial spine is popularly supposed to be tolerably thrill-proof.

BUT I get quite excited sometimes. Editing ADVENTURE isn't like editing any other magazine; I've been on five others, and they were all tame beside it.

For instance, I've learned about three buried treasures. If a man can get on the trail of a buried treasure and not feel some thrills there's something wrong with him.

By the time you read this, one man I know will probably be off among the wild places with a big motor-boat as sole connection between him and civilization. I wish I were with him, for somehow I have a "hunch" that he's going to find what he's looking for. And it's worth finding.

Then there's one on Cocos Island, off the coast of Central America. Don't laugh. We know Cocos Island is an old, old story in the treasure-hunting business. But a venerable yet hale and hearty adventurer blew in here nearly a year ago, and he *knows*. Incidentally, he might be called the King of Cocos Island. He has been living there a good many years, and makes a very nice thing out of it by way of trade. What he knows about the Cocos treasure isn't very romantic, but it accounts for his calmly watching the periodical expeditions that come to his little island, and for his laughing while they dig.

I do not know where the third treasure is, except in a general way. The man who knows lives out West and is quietly waiting till he can get, not a capitalist, but exactly the right kind of capitalist. Three men in three other towns go quietly about their every-day business till he gives the word. He made one attempt some years ago, failed through no fault of his own, and profited by the experience.

Unfortunately, I'm not the kind of capitalist he wants, because I'm not a capitalist at all. But if I were——

TWO coincidences. In "Victoria Cross Stories" Allen Stephens describes the death of Lord Roberts's son at the battle of Colenso, when he and five others won the famous Cross. It happens that Talbot Mundy fought at Colenso and was an eye-witness of the heroic incident.

It also happens that an English army officer was in the office a couple of months ago, and, seeing Mr. Mundy across the big reception-room, recognized his face as familiar. He, too, had been at Colenso, and had noted Mr. Mundy as a bearer of important dispatches under a terrific fire that mowed down the grass behind him as he rode. Thereby hangs a tale, but Mr. Mundy is afflicted with modesty.

THE Victoria Cross article is signed "Allen Stephens," but the author's real name is Stephen Allan Reynolds, a New Englander who, among other things, has served in three British and one American regiment and spent several years on a whaling voyage in the Arctic.

SEVERAL months ago, in speaking of Russell B. Huffman, who wrote "Through Perilous Peru," I said that he had disappeared completely—vanished for unknown parts, but that he would undoubtedly be bobbing up again fresh from new adventures. Well, he has. I've just had a letter from him, written at St. Marc, Haiti, and he's been through one of those "comedy revolutions" they have down there.

PLEASE allow ADVENTURE to congratulate itself on "The Marriage of Kettle." We knew that Captain Kettle and McTodd were prime favorites with the American reading public, but—well, we won't rejoice out loud any more.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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Feb. 1912 Vol. 3 No. 4

The Marriage of Kettle

by C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne

SYNOPSIS: The steamer *Norman Towers* is caught short of coal in the midst of the Sargasso Sea. Captain Saturday Farnish, easy-going and hard-drinking, is unequal to the emergency. His first mate, Owen Kettle, whom the kind-hearted but inefficient old man had raised from a boy, shoulders the responsibility. After overcoming the demented chief engineer, who had run dangerously amuck, the dapper, fire-eating little Kettle picks the worst men of the crew and sets off in a boat on the desperate chance of getting coal from another ship. The German steamer *Rhein* refuses to stop when hailed, but shortly afterward breaks down, is boarded by Kettle, practically captured and ordered to return with coal to the *Norman Towers*. Miss Violet Chesterman, an English gentlewoman, tells Kettle that the *Rhein* was forced to stop because its engines had been tampered with by McTodd, a Scotch engineer with a sharp tongue, a colossal impudence, great efficiency and a humorous outlook on life. The coal and Miss Chesterman are transferred to the *Norman Towers*. At Liverpool Kettle is beaten insensible by thugs and rescued by Miss Dubbs, barmaid at the Masons' Arms. Later she secures him his first command, captaincy of a steamer chartered by Sir George Chesterman to search the west coast of Africa for a wrecked steamer loaded with valuable copper. Kettle is unaware that Sir George is a brother of Violet.

CHAPTER XIII

MR. McTODD GRACIOUSLY DECIDES

THERE was, so far as I can gather, no actual proposal. They never even got to Christian names, and only in moments of forgetfulness slipped out "dear." It was always "Captain," or "Miss Dubbs," from one to the other, but the fact of their engagement was public property, and the little landlord in his deepest voice had pronounced benediction, and the audience in the Snug had enthusiastically drunk their healths separately and in combination.

Not till the day after the bargain had been struck, and in a ship broker's office in Liverpool, did Captain Kettle discover that Sir George was Sir George Chesterman, and

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though the coincidence of names struck him as peculiar, he did not, somehow, associate him with the Miss Violet Chesterman of the *Rhein* and the *Norman Towers*. They had not a feature in common, and for that matter, so far as he could trace, not a taste in common. Miss Violet, according to her own account, was society woman to the tips of her shoes; Sir George loved the country and country pursuits, and hated the town and all its peoples. To make assurance doubly sure Captain Kettle had asked the landlord of the Masons' Arms as to what other members of the family ever came to the hall except Lady Chesterman, and was promptly told "None." Sir George and his wife were a lonely couple with neither chick nor relative to brighten them, "which probably accounts," boomed the host in his moving whisper, "for her ladyship's tantrums. As I've often said to Ma, if you've no children of your own, the best way to avoid dulness is to get other people round you, and that's why we went into the public line."

The steamer of Sir George's choice was finally run to earth—or to be more precise, to moorings—in the Tyne, opposite the Dolly Stairs, and Captain Kettle, after an impressive and respectful farewell to his fiancée, took train for South Shields, and engaged there a select but inexpensive lodging. He traveled down in mufti, because his mate's uniforms were having that extra band of gold lace added to the cuff which is the mercantile marine shipmaster's special ensign, but he carried the marks of the sea and his grade in the cock of his red torpedo beard, and in every line of his spruce figure, and more than one fellow mariner inspected him with a curious stare as if to recall on which of the many seas they had met. It remained for the guard of the train at Kirby Stephen to put the seal on this general recognition.

"Captain," said the guard, opening the door of Kettle's compartment, and touching his hat, "there's a party in the rear coach that'll be handed over to the police when we get to Newcastle if some one don't take charge of him."

"Well?" said Kettle, tickled at the title, but feeling the sedateness that was due to his rank.

"He says he's a ship's officer, sir. It would be a pity for him to get into trouble if it could be avoided."

"What's the trouble? Is he drunk?"

"He's that, sir, and Scotch, and he's preaching a lecture to the other passengers in his compartment on the peculiarities of the English nose, as illustrated by themselves, and won't let them read their papers. It would be a charity, Captain, if you could do something, only"—the guard looked pointedly at his watch—"only you'll have to be quick about it."

"I'll go-look-see," said Captain Kettle, and jumped briskly out on to the platfrom.

The noise of argument came billowing out of a carriage window, and Kettle made for it and put in his head.

"Gosh," said a dishevelled man inside "it's the pirate! Mr. Mate, Mr. Picaroon, I've mislaid your name, but you're the very fellow I've come back to England to see. Ye'll ken I promised ye a yarn——"

"I know you did, and that's what I've come for, but I don't want to share it. Come along forward. I've got a compartment to myself there."

"And yon's a very wise obsairve. The yarn's full of humor, an' these loons here wad no' open their lips by way o' smile though Nestor swore the jest were laughable. Ye can tell their seriousness by the cut o' their nebs. The quotation by the way's from Shakespeare or George R. Sims, but I forget which. Ye see——"

"Come along, man, or the train will pull out."

"And the railroad company would be the gainer by half my fare. I'll no' gratify them. Aweel, ma friends, ye may enjoy your disgraceful nebs in peace—if ye can—till ye meet me next. Mr. Mate, I'll take your arm just to show ma friendly feeling towards y'rsl'."

NOW to be saddled with a talkative drunken man is embarrassing to any one, but when you are a seafarer with a good deal of ignorance of, and distrust for, English shore ways, and when, moreover, you are journeying to join your first command as captain, the situation approaches the tragic. Captain Kettle had a large experience of drunks; few men had more; and his usual treatment of them might be described as drastic but curative. But here he found himself face to face with the very engineer, McTodd, who had in plain truth saved the life of himself and his boat's crew out there in the Sargasso Sea (and incidentally one supposes saved the *Norman*

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Towers and her complement), and the ordinary treatment of tongue, foot and fist seemed inappropriate. So he listened to Mr. McTodd's garrulous tale of how he sailed with the outraged *Rhein* into Tampico, how every officer on board of her "wanted to eat" him, but daren't; how (as a great triumph) he had been called upon to translate the Spanish pilot's English into English the eye-glassed German Captain could understand, when they drove in between Tampico pierheads, and how the Germans threw him into jail in that city, and how the British Consul, stirred into activity by his tongue, reluctantly got him out. It was a great epic.

"And where are you bound for now?"

"Man," said McTodd, "I'm out to seek my fortune. My father was Free Kirk meenister at Ballindrochiter, though there's many that's met his son have never guessed it, and a fine education was all the capital he could give me. The worrld's my oyster, as Alfred Tennyson has neatly put the situation, and here"—he waved a discolored thumb—"here is my knife wherewith I shall open it. Now you're looking prosperous yourself. Maybe you know of a billet."

Captain Kettle was torn between gratitude and duty. "You're certificated, of course?"

"I'd scorn to deceive you. But in the academic sense of the word I'm not. I know more of my craft than half the ducks that carry the Chief's ticket will ever learn all their black lives through, but the Board of Trade will no' believe it. Ye see—in your ear—at times my spelling's phonetic, and that's fair ruin in an examination-room."

"Well, that makes it difficult. I'm in want of a Chief Engineer. But the owner, I'm sure, would insist on his being fully qualified."

Mr. McTodd regarded his companion with an offensive eye. "D'ye mean to tell me some philanthropist's been fool enough to put you in command of a ship of your own? Well, well, there was a humorist once said it takes all sorts to make a world!"

The newly made captain was growing more and more restive under all this, and there were moments when his fingers itched to take their accustomed course; but each time with an effort he called his new dignity to his aid and gripped his teeth into the butt of his cigar and sat grimly noninterferent in his corner.

"And who did you say was your owner?"

"I didn't say. He wishes to keep in the background. Nor can I tell you what's our real port of destination. We clear for Falmouth and beyond, but really we sail with sealed orders."

"Oho! More piracy, may I ask? That seems to be your taste, and I must say you've a pretty knack for it. For myself, I like to keep my skirts clear of this sort of thing, coming, as I've telled ye, from respectable stock. But for you, of course, being without a pedigree, it'll no matter if your inclination runs that way."

"Now just you listen here!" said the exasperated sailor. "You've got to the edge of my patience. Give me three more words of your lip, and I'll throw you out of the window!"

"Gosh!" said Mr. McTodd, "I'd love to see you try!" and made an active spring. But Captain Kettle's expert fist shot out and caught him in mid-air accurately on the angle of the jaw, and Captain Kettle's trained fingers thereafter twisted his neckcloth till he was three parts strangled, and then Mr. McTodd was violently thrown into a corner of the carriage so that his head rattled against the Company's woodwork, and he was told to stay there in words that there was no possibility of misunderstanding.

"You needn't shout," said the Scot, "and cause inconvenience to the rest of the passengers in the train, who, for anything you know, may be respectable people. Your worrds were pairfectly clear. If you wish me to sleep, I'll do it for the present. I've been in the sun. It's a thing that might happen to anybody. I've known even Deacons of the Kirk to suffer from the effects of the sun. So I bid ye good-night. We'll renew the conversation later."

Now Captain Kettle was by nature generous and hospitable, but he recognized the limitations of his new position. He was under obligations to Mr. McTodd that it would not be an easy matter to repay. But if he was going to ship the man as a subordinate officer on his new command it would be an unheard-of thing to offer him hospitality in his own lodgings beforehand. Also he was in very considerable doubt as to whether it would not be a betrayal of trust to sign him on at all. Of course, by the ritual of the sea service, so long as a man keeps sober and does his work whilst on

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duty, that is all that is required of him. His shore morals and habits are a matter of his own private concern. But would McTodd be reliable even at sea?

The little sailor thought these matters through over two more cigars, and shook the engineer into wakefulness, when at last the slow cross-country train dragged its weary length into Newcastle Station.

"Man," said Mr. McTodd, "I thank ye. I'm rested fine. Just in parentheses I'd like to tell ye that getting in the sun's no' a general habit of mine; it's a digression. I make no doubt (by your looks) that the same has happened to yourself, and that's why ye handled me so tenderly. I thank ye for that same. I've no' been put to sleep with such gentle care since I lay in ma mither's arms. Let me prospect; where's the third-class refreshment room? It's a habit with me, which you'd do weel to follow, to let first-class refreshment rooms alone. They gie ye the same-sized whisky in the first at a greater price and containing less bite to the cubic inch, and moreover the company you find yourself in there is apt to be above your station."

"I've no time to drink with you," said Captain Kettle savagely. "My train leaves in a minute's time. Will you take the loan of a pound?"

"I thank ye for the kind thought, but for the moment I do not need an advance. Ye see the British Consul in Tampico, guided by me, mulcted that Dutch skipper in good heavy damages for false imprisonment, and as I am no' what you might call a wasteful body, I didn't spend it as the Consul had intended on a passage home to England. No, man; I just got a cast across the Gulf to Vera Cruz, and got sent home to bonny Cardiff from there as a distressed British seaman."

"Well, come to the point. Do you want a billet?"

"Gosh, the generosity of these great powerful men who run the empire!" Mr. McTodd raised his eyes in marvel toward the roof of Newcastle Station, and nodded at the dirty glass. "It's no' every kind of post I'd take. For example, I'd refuse an archbishopric, as they say the hours are too long; and Parliament I never had a taste for, and the peerage is overcrowded. But a nice quiet job as a mayor, now, where a cellar is keepit in the Town Hall——"

"By James, listen! My ship's the *Wongaroo*; she's lying in the river off the Dolly Stairs. If you show up there to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, passably sober, I will do my best to give you a job. If you arrive drunk enough to disgrace me, I'll throw you into the river. Good-night."

Mr. McTodd put his hands deep into his jacket pockets, tilted the clay pipe between his teeth till it assumed a meditative cock, and gazed upon the rapidly retreating back of his companion.

"Vara' full of the importance of his braw new captain's ticket is yon. It's a vara humorous situation, come to think of it. Weel, I've put a fine edge on to his temper, which as like as not some comparative stranger will benefit by later on. Oh, vara humorous. Captain Kettle indeed, is he? Well, I'll sail with him if I have to sign on as donkey-man. There'll be no monotony with Kettle as Old Man. Gosh! He's the sort that would find trouble in a ruri-decanal meeting!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE "WONGAROO," A SHIP WITH A PAST

THE *Wongaroo* was a steamboat with a past. At her birth she had been designed by a naval architect who was admittedly a genius, but who had the knack of never building a boat that paid. Her registered tonnage was 750 and her horsepower officially 185. Her engines were early triple expansions of a pattern and design that were never repeated, and her pumps were a perpetual conundrum to the unfortunates whose duty it was to overlook their eccentricities. She had a double bottom of such size that it seriously ate into her hold-space, and her lines were such as to give her the minimum of cargo capacity with a maximum of water friction. Exasperated owners had from time to time so altered the plan of her weights that her metacenter had crept up inches at a time till she had grown to be alarmingly cranky; and similarly, through other interference with her frames, she was by no means as stiff as could have been desired. In moments of stress it was held that she could roll three several ways at the same time.

She was built of iron—not steel—and though her plates were comparatively thick, they were heavily corroded, and as incidentally she had bumped over sandbars and

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otherwise been aground far more times than a respectable boat ought to own to, she had sheared the rivets of a good many of her plates, and the concrete with which they had been replaced was hardly an efficient substitute.

In outward appearance she was sawed off, stubby and clumsy-looking. Her smoke-stack was fat and short, and she carried her standard compass on the top of a long pole. When she started life raw from the builders' slips she had yards crossed on both of her tall masts, but as the years went on and fashions changed she shed these, and she steams into this chronicle carrying the rig of a fore-and-aft schooner.

Mr. McTodd, after a long study of her beauties, owned that he had seen her counter part once before, and on being asked by his Captain to name the locality said it was on a cheap photographer's back-cloth in Manchester. "But I never knew that was a picture of a real ship before I saw this old girl," said McTodd. "I thought it was a land artist's imagination."

Her history was hard to get hold of, but I have been at pains to rake up most of it. I will not repeat it in detail here, because it implicates many worthy commercial men who have prospered since they got rid of her, but she seems to have had no less than twelve owners before she came into the hands of the merchant—he was really a ship breaker—from whom Sir George Chesterman chartered her, and to have changed her name no less than nine times. I wonder how many people will recognize her as the *Vestus*, the *Polydorus*, the *R. K. Williams*, or the *Sosha Maru*. (She turned turtle, by the way, when she was under that Eastern flag, drowned her crew and was salvaged by a Javanese sponge boat, after her water ballast had righted her.) She was also in her day the *Cormorant*, the *Golondrina*, and the *Devastaoni*, which last was when she was supposed to be a Venezuelan man-of-war, or rebel filibuster, whichever side of local hostilities you judge her from. Her other two aliases I shall keep to myself, as they suggest items of history which are better forgotten.

Finally, when Captain Kettle took her over, she was noted for being cranky in a seaway, for carrying the minimum of cargo her tonnage demanded, for being a coal-eater of the deepest dye, and for taking long sheers to starboard when she was that way out, from which no amount of helm could wean her. She was, all the experts declare, the most undesirable 750-ton steamboat at that period afloat in any of the seas, and Captain Kettle—who, be it thoroughly understood, had known better things—loved her.

Captain Owen Kettle on his voyage from the Tyne to Grand Canary was the busiest man in all his wide profession. He wore his mate to the bone, and he worked his heavy crew almost to mutiny, but by the time the disreputable old wreck which had left the Northern river had waddled her way down to the Islands, she had a look of meretricious smartness about her such as she had probably never worn before in all her disreputable career. Her paint was new, and her bright work glittered; her rigging was set up till it was as taut as bar iron; her stanchions were straightened, and her dingy funnel was painted yellow with a jaunty stripe of green. And Mr. McTodd, the second engineer, working below amongst the ruins of her machinery, took up bearings and did other repairs whilst she was under way with a recklessness which can not be too severely spoken about.

"One hundred and ninety-four miles, sir, since noon yesterday," said Captain Kettle coming out of the charthouse after working out his day's run. "That averages eight-point-one knots an hour. We're whacking her up a bit, and I shouldn't wonder that if the wind gets a bit more aft and we can give her the gaff topsails I've had made out of those spare awnings, she may log as much as eight-point-two or two-five. She's a famous old girl when she gets decent treatment."

"You'll make the Cunard people green with envy if this leaks out," said Sir George. "Have a cigar?"

"We should bring-to for the Las Palmas health boat at 3:20 to-morrow, and that's allowing thirty-five minutes for retardation owing to a slightly heavier sea which I expect to get up when we get further into the Trade."

"As an experienced passenger, let me give you a tip, Skipper. Don't show the machinery of your calculations. We shore folk prefer plain miracles. There will be mails in Grand Canary which left England a week after we started. I suppose you couldn't cut the islands out of the program?"

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"Not well, sir. We've burned a lot of coal getting here. And if there's much work to be done on the African Coast, I'll like to be rebunkered to our full capacity. We shal'n't be able to do very much with sail. The Trades will be a bit too heavy for the old girl, flying light as she is, at this time of year. But don't you worry about the coaling, Sir George. You take a run up to the Monte whilst we're getting the stuff on board, and I'll have decks holy-stoned down as white as a tablecloth again by the time you're back. Though, of course, if it was cables you were thinking of——"

The big man shook a weary head. "I wasn't bothering about either coal or cables, as it happened. Fact is, a friend of mine stated an intention of joining me down here, and to tell the truth I don't want to be bothered. I'm not feeling hospitable. You and I get along very decently together, Skipper, and a third might very easily upset the balance. If the worst comes to the worst, I have made arrangements that the —er—intruder shall be looked after, so you needn't worry your head about that. But I most piously hope that one of this excellent person's usual changes of plan will take place, and we shall find ourselves undisturbed. I'm going to have a cocktail. Will you join me?"

"Not at sea, sir. If you'll excuse me I'll go and give the Mate a bit of a brisk-up. That man's not served with me long enough even yet to learn my ways. He's letting those hands mutter whilst they paint."

SIR GEORGE CHESTERMAN turned his tired eyes to the sea, and watched the fleets of pink-sailed Portuguese men-of-war that cruised placidly over the dark blue swells alongside. "I wonder," said he to himself, "what sort of a time a nautilus has of it? Seems a nice, easy life. No cables, or party whips writing unpleasant letters, or wives with a taste for everything you happen to dislike, or—Pah! what a sickly-minded ass I am. The odds are they have the whole lot—especially the cables. There must be rum customs and inventions amongst these navigating shellfish. Gad, I believe if I'd the chance of a swap I'd risk it. The more I think back at England, home and beauty, the more sick I seem to be of the whole lot of it." The big retriever, scenting trouble, muzzled a sympathetic wet nose into his master's hand.

He drank the cocktail which the steward brought him, and laughed at a new idea. "Gad, it would be a great joke to fool her, if she does turn up, and leave her to cool her heels amongst the Liverpool week-end trippers at Las Palmas. I've a monstrous great mind to do it. Ah, there's the luncheon bell. Skipper, half a moment!"

"Sir?"

"I say, couldn't you put in at Lanzerote or one of these other islands, and do your coaling there?"

"It would be a long, slow job. You see, Lanzerote has no harbors, only open roadsteads, and as likely as not we'd have to hang there rolling to our anchors for a good fortnight before we could arrange with these *mañana* Spaniards to find a bottom which would bring the coal across from Grand Canary. And then, you see, you'd be a fortnight's grub and water to the bad which would have to be replaced, not to mention a fortnight on your charter and insurance, and a fortnight's wages, which would all be to the bad anyway. But I know what you're thinking of."

"Oh, do you?"

"Yes, sir. It's those cases of rifles and the ammunition-boxes in number two hold."

"I'm afraid you're wrong; I hadn't given them a thought. But what's the point?"

"Well of course, in spite of promises, some one at the English end may have blown the gaff and told the Customs at Las Palmas."

"Well?"

"If somebody definitely accuses us of attempting to import arms of precision into Africa, against international law, they'll try and stop us. By James, I should like to see them do it!"

The tired eyes brightened. "Why, would you kick?"

"Yes, sir, I'd kick good and hard, and I'd take the old girl out of their harbor in spite of all the teeth they could show!"

"That sounds interesting. But isn't there a fort or something?"

"I believe they've some guns. They were lying on one of the quays with their tails wrapped up in packing-cases when I was round there a year ago. They were going to haul them on to a hill at the back of the catalina, and mount them—*mañana*. I know, because I asked. You'll see when

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we get there they'll still be on the quay, all except the packing-cases, which some one will have pinched for firewood."

"But supposing somebody had invented an energetic Spaniard, and they have been hauled up to the hill-top and mounted, and there is a filled magazine alongside, and they gave you fair warning that if you didn't stop they'd blow you into the middle of next week, what then?"

"I should steam out and let 'em see the red duster blowing at my poopstaff, and I should break out two more at my fore and main trucks, and I should like to see the beastly Dagos dare to fire on those! And if they did, by James, I'd let them fire and be hanged to them, but I should be cocksure they never could hit me. And now, sir, if you please, dinner's cooling."

"I wish," thought Sir George wistfully, "I had half this little man's enthusiasm, though the Lord only knows what mess he's going to land me into if he has only half his own way!"

CHAPTER XV

A STEWARDESS AND A PASSENGER

LAS PALMAS harbor, tucked away under the decayed volcano of the Isleta, displayed the usual collection of British steamers, Canary baccalhao schooners and coal-dust, and the warmth of the sun overhead was cooled by a racing Trade wind, which carried with it a strong scour of African sand. On the quays and in the coal lighters Spanish cargadores shouted musically, but did little work until they were urged thereto by profane British mates; and those units of the Army of Spain which happened to be off duty appeared to be dangling their cotton-trousered legs over the edges of the concrete walls, and smoking interminable cigarettes. And over the whole harbor water was spread a scum of coal-dust and an odor of baccalhao imperfectly cured.

A grinning Parsee in an elaborately embroidered smoking-cap brought his boat alongside as Captain Kettle brought his precious *Wongaroo* up to the mooring-buoy, and displayed Birmingham Benares brass, Teneriffe drawn-linen work and Three Castles cigarettes to prospective buyers, adding for the benefit of the ignorant, "I am your fellow countree-man. I sell you best stuff, cheap-price. Also I have letter from lady to *Capitan*."

"Lower away the companion-ladder, Mr. Smith," said Captain Kettle to a mariner beside him on the upper bridge. The little steamer from her size could at the utmost afford only two mates. But Kettle had picked from the crew a steady man who had signed on as A. B., had added ten shillings a month out of his own pocket to his wages, and given him brevet-rank as third mate from sheer delight at having an aide-de-camp at moments like these, when the mate was on the foredeck, and the second mate on the poop as by sea rubric ordained. "If you can get that chattering baboon's boat underneath, let go your ladder by the run and stove him in. I'll let the son of a dog know what's the tariff for bringing off letters to me from ladies I don't know!"

"Ay, aye, sir!" said Smith, and ran briskly down off the narrow bridge, whilst Captain Kettle ached to think that in spite of all his care and instructions the *Wongaroo* might have been brought up more smartly to her moorings. And then, with his spruce uniform fairly straining with pride, he descended to do the honors of his own charthouse to the port officials, and for the first time to write "O. Kettle, Master" at the foot of documents.

There was one unpleasant interlude. The Parsee managed to make his way on board and again proffered his "letter from lady" to the new-fledged skipper. Spanish Port Doctor and Spanish Port Captain grinned knowingly, and Kettle arose in his wrath and kicked his fellow subject down over the side. "Quartermaster," said he, "if that man or anything else that's escaped out of the monkey-house gets on board again, I'll disrate you!"

The advent of the coaling company's agent handicapped his further remarks, and for the next hour Captain Kettle was immersed in the intricacies of the ship's business in a foreign port. And then came other tradespeople, and touts innumerable.

The entry of Miss Dubbs was a marvel of quietness and discretion. Captain Kettle gulped and collected himself. "My James," he said, "you here, Miss! Whatever's gone wrong?"

"Nothing, Captain. Is this your private cabin?"

"It's the charthouse, yes."

"And are you at liberty at any time soon?"

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"Yes. Now. Here, you; clear out. My dear, there must be something gone very wrong."

She laughed a little nervously. "I tell you nothing has happened, except that I've changed my job. Ah, there's Sir George's retriever. Good old dog, Rex. But haven't you got my letter? I sent one by a native in a boat."

"My conscience! That'll have been what that unbaptised Parsee was jabbering about. No, my dear, I never got it. But if you're in trouble, of course you've come to the right place."

"I tell you, dear, there was no real trouble. For a long time—in fact all the time since I've known you, Captain, I've been a good deal dissatisfied with business in the public line, and when Pa got a bit fresh with me the other night about not serving a gentleman with another glass when I said he'd had enough, I thought it was a good opportunity to quit, and handed in my resignation there and then on the spot. I may tell you I'd had it in mind ever since Sir George spoke to me."

"My dear, you'd better tell me the whole thing at once. What's Sir George to do with it?"

"Hasn't he told you? Well! However, I suppose he thought we were too much in one another's confidence to have any secrets. Anyway, all he said was this, and mind, it was after you'd left Foston, and were working on the *Wongaroo* at South Shields, as you wrote me. He comes in one day to the Mason's Arms, and he says, 'Miss Dubbs, do you know any reliable lady who'd go out on our little steamer as sort of maid-companion-stewardess to look after my sister? I don't want a maid altogether, because she's got one already who's no good for this sort of trip; I want something more than a stewardess; and I want something a bit less than the ordinary useless companion.' I laughs and says I don't think there were many ladies yet born who were up to all those requirements, and he laughs and says he supposed they could be made. He's always a very merry manner with him, has Sir George, but he knows where to stop. He's always quite the gentleman."

"I've found that myself."

"Well, I said that if I came across any lady who would fulfil all his requirements I would let him know."

"'That won't do, Miss Dubbs,' says he, 'I sail to-morrow, and according to Captain Kettle's calculations our boat's going to take a most pleasantly long time to reach Grand Canary, which is to be our first port of call. My sister's got the date out of me, and declares she's going to follow by the mail boat, and join at Las Palmas. I don't think she will; it's a score to one she changes her mind between now and then; but if she doesn't, she sails by the Cape mail boat from Southampton to-day week. Now I don't care for her to go unless she has the escort I have been describing to you, so if you see your way to providing the young person, just drop her a line to this address, and I shall be infinitely obliged to you.'"

"Ah," said Captain Kettle. "But I never thought of your coming down to this sort of business, dear."

"And what sort is that, please?"

"Well, stewardess."

"I prefer to call it 'companion.' But whatever it is, Captain, my idea is that as I was a minister's daughter and a lady once, a lady I shall always be. How's that?"

"Right as usual," said the little sailor with a sigh. "But there may be more complications in this than you think."

"You mean the trip's not safe? There may be trouble with those tribesmen where the wreck is lying? Well, I'm ready to take what comes. Or I'll put it this way, if you like: what's good enough for the gentleman I'm engaged to is good enough for me. Besides, it seemed likely to be my only chance of foreign travel. We must look things in the face, Captain; when we are married, it is quite possible I shall have to stay at home from then afterward."

Captain Kettle tugged vexedly at his red torpedo beard. "Quite true, my dear, quite true. But those aren't the only complications. Does it occur to you what I am on this ship? Do you understand that the second mate, who's fifty-five if he's a day, refers to me as the Old Man—and I'm twenty-seven? Do you know that here on board ship you'll have to give me respect, and say 'Yes, Captain' and 'No, Captain' when you speak to me? That's discipline."

Miss Dubbs rose to the whole of her statuesque height. "And pray when," said she, "have I ever done anything else?"

"No, quite true," said Kettle miserably. "It'll come easier to you than it would to most. And of course, if you call it 'companion' and not 'stewardess,' and only sign

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on ship's articles for a shilling a month—as Sir George's sister must of course, seeing that we don't carry a passenger certificate—well, a lot may be overlooked. But in ways that you don't understand you really do make it remarkably awkward for me. I wish you'd told me beforehand that you'd got this in mind."

"And then you'd have headed me off? I knew the African Coast where you are going to was a dangerous spot."

"Quite so. I expect it is."

"Then, as I've said before," replied Miss Dubbs comfortably, "what's good enough for you, my dear, in that line is good enough for yours truly. So don't let us have any more grousing." She took out a hat-pin and stood before the glass and prinked up her elaborate black hair. "Of course some girls might even have expected you to say you were pleased to see them."

"Ay, but," said Captain Kettle doggedly, "there may be other complications still. You say you are Miss Chesterman's companion. Did you travel out together?"

"Thank you, I know my place. She went saloon. I, of course, came second cabin, and very comfortable and social I may say I found it."

"Well, there you are, my dear. We've no second cabin here. We haven't even a mess-room. The engineers take their meals in the saloon with Sir George and me and the mates, and a nasty feeder the Chief is, if ever I saw one. Well, you've your choice, miss, between that and the fo'cs'le."

"Does the cabin steward dine with the common sailors and firemen?"

"Oh, I expect he gets his bit in the pantry, standing up. No one ever worries as to where stewards mess, unless it's on a big boat where they have a proper glory hole. No need to trouble about stewards; they keep fat enough, and never worry about any Board of Trade whack."

"I shall take my meals with the steward, Captain, and I've no doubt that if he's a gentleman, he'll provide me with an aerated water-case to sit upon."

"It's disgusting to think about the lady I'm going to marry doing this sort of thing, miss, whilst I'm sitting down getting my meals with Sir George and his sister."

"You're different. You're there because you're Captain, and head of the table on your own ship is your lawful position. But I know my own place, just as you know yours, and I'm going to keep it, and don't try and make an alteration, because I won't stand it. So now, Captain, you plainly understand. You'll kindly look upon me as a stewardess and treat me exactly as such whilst I am on board here under your command. And now, my dear, I'll bid you good-day for the present, as I've to go back ashore again to the hotel to pack up Miss Chesterman's trunks."

CHAPTER XVI

RIFLE PRACTISE

BY AN amiable eccentricity of the British Shipping Laws a vessel which does not own that expensive luxury, a Passenger Certificate, when she does carry passengers, as so frequently is the case, signs them on before shore officials as members of her crew. Thus Sir George Chesterman, M. P., wrote his name to the wholly erroneous statement that he was a qualified ship's surgeon and that he was content to serve as such for the entirely inadequate salary of one shilling sterling per mensem. Miss Violet Chesterman declared that she assented to certain conditions of service as read out to her, and agreed to conform to them in all items, also on the same cheap terms; and bracketed with hers appeared the name of Miss Emily Dubbs as an indication that she had taken similar vows. And so over all of them Captain Kettle, as Master, held powers of the high justice, the middle and the low, as by the Law of the Sea ordained.

It is fair a thing to say that on the run from the Islands to the African Coast there were three acutely uncomfortable people among the *Wongaroo's* after guard, namely the two women and Captain Owen Kettle, and there were two, to wit, Sir George Chesterman and Mr. Neil Angus McTodd, who both understood the situation and were cynically amused at it. Rex, the big black retriever, who had also a strong sense of humor in moments when he was alone with Sir George, showed by grins and wrigglings that he also was highly tickled by surrounding events.

Captain Owen Kettle on his part kept up a constant activity. When once they were clear of Grand Canary—without interference from the authorities, by the way—he

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mustered all hands on deck, and made announcements:

"Men," he said, "Sir George Chesterman, M.P., has chartered this ship to go and look for a steamboat that is embayed behind some reefs off the African Coast. You've heard most of the tale already, I know, because it's been talked of in the cabin at meals, and what's discussed there always gets forrard. Now it's not likely the tribes over yonder will give any trouble. They are the peoples of the Sus country, and the Sultan of Morocco has given them such a bad time on every occasion when he has arrived down there to collect taxes that they ought to be civil to every one who doesn't happen to come from Morocco. Besides, we've got a cargo below—I don't mind telling you now—of rifles and ammunition which we are open to selling to deserving tribesmen on reasonable terms. At the same time I'm not taking anything to do with colored men on trust, and if they are anxious for trouble I'm exactly the man to give it to them. For that reason I intend to teach you all how to let off a gun without shooting any of your neighbors and with a reasonable chance of hitting the mark you're aiming at. Now then, are there any experts amongst you?"

There was a pause, and the crew looked at one another sheepishly.

"That's better. I like modesty. Anyone ever even handled a gun?"

A grimy fireman threw the sweat-rag over his shoulder, stood out, and came to military attention. "R. N. R., sir. Stoker rating. I've learned my drill, but I'm only what you might call a fourth-class shot."

"You're one of the men I want. Come now, what are you two on the hatch grinning about?"

"I was just saying that I was a pretty good game shot, sir, before I came to sea, and Somers, my mate here, was the same. In fact it was because we was such good shots we thought it better to leave where we was ashore. But we neither of us ever handled a rifle. Shot-guns was what we was brought up with."

"Brace of poachers, were you, eh? Well, your morals will have had time to improve since you've been aboard of me, and your shooting will come back to you. Step up now. Anybody else?"

A bent old bald-headed man piped out: "I was quartermaster, sir, once on a China boat with a coolie crew, and two or three times when they or the Chow passengers got fresh, the Old Man—I should say Captain—served out Winchesters to us whites. I never let off mine, but I got to know the handling of her, and I guess if I'd one given me now, I wouldn't shoot any of this crowd, even if it did come to be a bit exciting. But I don't know as I could hit anything I aimed at, unless the mark was mighty close."

CAPTAIN KETTLE from his elevation pounced down upon them sourly. "You're an unpromising lot of toughs. I wonder what you'd call yourselves on a census paper. Sailors you certainly are not. Well, with the Lord's help, I'll lick you into some kind of horse marines before I'm through with you. Bo's'n, break out two cases of those rifles from Number Two hold and distribute them round. You Reservist, you Black Poacher, you Red Poacher, and you Coolie Driver, I appoint you corporals for the time being. If you're efficient you'll get an extra tot of rum a day. If you aren't, and you can't drum sense into your squads, you'll hear from me personally, and so will they. Now you've each got seven men apiece, and two extra that you can toss for, and your first job is to teach them which end of the rifle to hold, and how to carry it about without poking anybody's eye out. I give you twenty-four hours to do it. That's the lot. Get away and set to work."

Sailormen are proverbially grumblers, but this crew (as Kettle expressed it) had the vice thoroughly worked out of them by this date. They had come aboard in the Tyne, bleary, ragged, sullen, mutinous and, owing to the slight mystery which hung over their enlistment, thought they were going to have an easy, idle time of it. Never were crew more disillusioned. An iron discipline descended on them and held them in rigid grooves. They were worked mercilessly at chipping ironwork, painting iron and woodwork, setting up rigging, caulking decks, holystoning decks, and a hundred other laborious operations; a blow followed a sullen word; a savage kick was the reward of a laggard arm; and the utmost was extracted from every one.

As a result, as far as man could make her, the homely little steamer was as smart as a yacht, and the all-nation rapscallions who manned her had been turned into a crew of

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hard, strong well-disciplined men, quick to answer an order, and, in all ordinary sea matters, skilful to carry it out. The big burly Member of Parliament watched the transition with an appreciative eye. He had seen men driven in politics, and had been rather contemptuous of the result. It struck him that after they had undergone the process they most of them ceased to be men. But here the process was reversed. The raw products that Captain Kettle had commenced upon were most of them less than men, and under his remorseless drill he had (as it appeared to Sir George) converted each one of them into the complete super-seaman.

After the lapse of that twenty-four hours hands were again called on deck, and they appeared smartly enough, each carrying his rifle in the method that appealed to him best. But they all handled their weapons as if they had at least a nodding acquaintance with them

"Now I've no idea of turning you sailors into a squad of infantry," said the little Captain. "I don't see that it would make me any the happier to have you taught soldiers' drill. But you've got to learn to shoot off those guns without shutting your eyes, and if you can learn to hit a target, so much the better. Bo's'n, get up a thousand rounds of cartridges, and make fast twenty-five fathoms of line on to the case when you have emptied it, and tow it astern. I don't suppose any of you men will hit it, except by accident, but the spouts in the water will show you where your shots go, and firing at a bobbing target like that will be much better practise for you than blazing at a fixed mark on a steady beach. It may occur to those amongst you who've got thinking machines, that a man when he's being shot at doesn't always keep quite still. The main point I want you to remember about this rifle practise is, don't hurry. Fourteen shots that miss don't do near as much damage as one that's well thought out and plugs the other party in the liver. That's a military fact."

Captain Owen Kettle at that period of his career was not in any way learned in the art of war. But at the same time one is forced to admit that he had a fine natural instinct for it. To be sure he was hampered by no textbook knowledge of pipeclayed military science, but out of his inner consciousness he evolved a scheme, and as it subsequently proved so eminently successful for irregular warfare, it may be here commended. In a few words it may be described thus: "First catch your man and take care he is not in a state of prosperity: work him and handle him till he is as hard as a nut, quick as a flash, and bold as a bull-terrier; and then teach him to shoot and take cover. Leading will do the rest."

The letter from Sir George's cousin, that unfortunate medical man from Harley Street who had gone astray, on which the plan of the whole expedition was built, though excellent in many details, was weak where it touched on the exact art of nautical astronomy. The Admiralty charts, also, of the whole of the West African seaboard are notoriously defective, and those of that section of the coast which just then interested Sir George Chesterman and his skipper were worse than this; they were imaginative. They marked reefs where there were none, islets where the sea-swells swept unchecked, and deep waters to which ominous breakers gave the open lie. Once, a good five miles out from the rolling dunes of the beach, the *Wongaroo* stopped suddenly in her steady eight-knot gait, shivered a little, and then went on; and Captain Kettle shivered also to think how near he had come to casting away his first command.

Henceforward the steamer kept an offing where the depth of water was beyond suspicion, and crow's nests were rigged whaler fashion at the mastheads, in which the hands took it in turn to be seasick and to search the shore-line with strong binoculars.

Even then they missed the object of their search on the first run down the coast, but when they had passed the southern limit of possibility, the *Wongaroo* turned north again doggedly to repeat the hunt with more thoroughness and at a slower pace. This time when an atom of doubt rested on the exact position of the shore-line, a boat was manned and sent away to explore it at closer range, and the jottings on the chart which indicated this boat's discoveries, as afterward forwarded by Sir George Chesterman to the proper quarters, form to-day a very useful addition to the world's knowledge of hydrography.

That Northwest Coast of Africa had by no means the smooth shore-line the authorized sea maps would have led them to believe. It swung out into gulfs and bays and was encrusted with islets; here, the mouth

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of a dead river that had once (perhaps no further back than Roman days) flowed from the Sahara country, showed a silted lagoon, dry at half ebb; there, sand-polished rocks and a scour of current had made a deep-water harbor, in which a navy might moor. For miles the coast would show nothing but barren rock and roasting sand; then a few lean palms would straggle across the crest of the dunes; and once in a way, in the mouth of some wady that carried a trickle of moisture, there would be a genuine patch of good dense tropical bush. But on the whole, the coast line and its islets were for mile after mile sterile and uninviting, and for a big ore steamer to be tucked away there in hiding seemed to be a thing impossible.

Twice indeed there were loud cries of "There she is!" and consequent excitement. But the first, on nearer inspection, proved to be the shell of a wrecked iron sailing ship, a ruin that had been grilled there by twenty years of outrageous sun, and the cause of the second alarm showed itself on examination to be no ship at all, but an outcrop of red hematite rock fashioned presumably by Satan for their irritation and annoyance.

CHAPTER XVII

REËNTER THE "NORMAN TOWERS"

"THIS," said Sir George, fanning himself under an awning, "isn't nearly as amusing as I expected." He and his black retriever had been off in the boat on the lure of the iron outcrop, and the pair of them had been nearly cooked alive on the passage, and narrowly escaped a spill in getting back on to the rolling steamer. "The ice-chest's empty, the fresh meat is finished, and by the taste of the water the cook makes tea and things of, I should imagine that some one must have been drowning a ferret in it. Also the coat of mold that collects on the outside of my cigars doesn't improve their flavor. I say, Skipper, what about turning back?"

"You're owner, sir," said Kettle stiffly. "It's for you to give orders."

"What do you say, Violet?"

"I agree with you that it's acutely uncomfortable"—she glanced out of the tail of her eye at Captain Kettle—"in more ways than one. But I don't think you ought to give the thing up so long as there's a chance left. It isn't as if you were a rich man, George, now. If you found the ship and realized on her, you'd be put nicely on your financial feet again, whilst if you don't, I should say you'll find yourself badly dipped. This trip must have cost you a tidy penny, one way and another."

"And is continuing to cost so much a day. I'm beginning to think poor Fred wrote that letter when he was light-headed, and that he never really saw the steamer again, once he had left her."

"I don't agree with you a bit. Remember I knew Fred, as well or better than you did, and he hadn't a particle of imagination in the whole of his composition. He was the most literal, matter-of-fact sort of person that ever bungled a medical practise. He prided himself on unemotional observation, and if he says there were islands and a steamer behind them, islands there are and a steamer there is. Don't you agree with me, Captain?"

"Miss," said Captain Kettle, "I'm a man without imagination myself. Sir George showed me the letter and I read it eight times over and saw nothing in it but plain straightforward statement of fact. We may, through my want of skill and eyesight, fail to find the spot he speaks about, or he may have gone badly adrift in his longitude, but I'll stake my ticket on it that he saw what he says he saw."

Amusement flickered in Sir George's tired eyes. "You're quite an enthusiast, Skipper. Well, Violet, if you can stick it for another week, I suppose I can too. The Skipper must try and make things as easy for us as he can manage it."

"I quite agree to the last proviso," said Miss Chesterman mischievously.

Mile by mile to the northward the *Wongaroo* searched during the hours of daylight, lying-to at night so as not to overrun her ground in the dark, and one blazing day succeeded another without tangible result. But in the cool of one evening success arrived at last. A hail came from the crow's-nest which was perched up high under the fore truck. "The bridge there!"

"Ay!"

"D'ye see a hummock broad on the starboard bow, sir, just on the edge of the coast? Seems to me two colors, sir, mustard-yellow and blue."

"That'll be the sunset, you fool," said the elderly second mate from the bridge. "I

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can't see it myself. Wait till I get the glasses."

The look-out man in the crow's-nest on the mainmast took up the tale, and the pair bawled down their news ding-dong.

"There's water in at the back of that land, sir."

"River mouth, sir."

"Looks to me like a lagoon, sir."

"There's water beyond again, sir. I just then got a glimpse of it as she rolled."

"That's an island off the coast, or a row of them."

"What you see is not the coast, sir, or at any rate there's a big river in at the back of it."

"There's a lagoon stretching right along. You can pick out points of it where the sun catches the water."

The old second mate stared through his glasses, but naturally could make out nothing, as the lower edge of the shore-line was well below his horizon, and so in the end he contented himself with the curt "Ay, aye," of acknowledgment. He was a stupid man and prided himself on his stupidity. He was hired (according to his theory) to act as second mate of a 750-ton steamboat, and not to make discoveries.

But Captain Kettle at the first note of news had walked briskly along the immaculate decks, had swung himself into the fore rigging, and had run nimbly aloft, and presently, passing outside the barrel which formed the crow's-nest, stood on the upper edges of it with an arm round the mast-head just beneath the truck.

Those on deck saw him there, a small white-clad figure, sawing backward and forward against the evening sky and peering dexterously through a long telescope at the shore and what lay beyond. Voices stopped. The *Wongaroo* slipped through the swells in silence, except for the dull internal rumble of her engines. All owned afterward to having felt a curious premonitory thrill.

To those who watched, Kettle seemed maddeningly slow. They watched his long telescope saw up and down in a constant arc as the steamer rolled, they watched him pick up the invisible ground beyond their horizon and examine it, as it seemed, foot by foot, and then he swung back and commenced the search all over again.

SIR GEORGE tried to break the tension. "Well, Skipper," he hailed, "is that the place?"

"Couldn't say, sir," came the chilly reply, and again the audience watched the telescope plod slowly over the coast-line. The sun, in a ball of scarlet fire, was sinking in visible inches below the western horizon and Captain Kettle's white drill uniform was tinted pink by the afterglow.

But presently from the masthead came the hail. "Mr. Forster?"

"Sir?" said the fat old second mate.

"D'ye see that hummock lying about due East, with the stripes on it, and a table top? Just take a bearing."

The second mate peered at the mark, and then squinted down at the binnacle. "East by South a quarter East, sir."

"Can you open out any land behind it?"

The old fellow peered again. "No, sir. The hummock's on my sky-line, with a clean edge to it."

"Very good. Then call away the surf-boat, and get water and some biscuits into her."

Captain Kettle came down from aloft as briskly as he had gone up, and it was typical of him that he did not make any pronouncement to satisfy the curiosity of his crew. Instead he went quietly to where Sir George sat with his sister and gave the news to them:

"There's a regular fishing-net of islands in at the back there. I can see no trace of our steamer, but it's quite possible she's there. Many of the islands are a tidy size, and she might easily be tucked in at the back and out of sight. I can't take the steamer in without a lot of sounding, so I'm going off in the boat."

"Not yourself? Not by night?" It was Miss Chesterman who raised the objection.

"It will be cooler for the men for one thing, miss, and in a couple of hours from now, when the moon's up it will be just as easy to see as in daylight."

"You'd better go too, Violet, if you think the Skipper needs chaperoning."

"I'd love to."

"The dew'll be very heavy, miss, drenching in fact. Besides, if we find what we're looking for we shall have to do a lot of sounding, and I may be away a couple of days. I couldn't undertake to look after a lady all that time in an open boat."

"Oh, all right," said Miss Chesterman, and frowned at her brother, who had caught

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her eye behind Captain Kettle's back and winked. That officer had gone to the side to see whether the boat's company and the rest of her equipment were to his taste, and presently returned to his room for a revolver and a bottle of Horner's Perfect Cure, which he stowed in his outside pockets. "The drug's a guard against malaria, sir," he explained. "Sea chills just about twilight are very dangerous in this climate. I shall give all hands of my boat's crew a tot of Horner presently, and you'll see they'll never turn a hair. Mr. Mate, I leave you in charge, and may be gone up to three days. Hang on here till then, and if we don't turn up, send in another boat, well armed. It's just possible we may get split in the surf or stove on a reef, and need fetching off. Miss Chesterman and Sir George, I wish you good evening. With luck, I hope to be back on board here again before breakfast."

A naked rope dangling down the *Wongaroo's* sleek black side was the only high-road to the boat, and Mr. Kettle went down it nimbly hand over hand, walking with his feet against the ship's plating. From bow and stern the guess-warp was dropped, and boat-hooks thrust the boat out from the ship's side; oars rose and fell into the water and settled comfortably between their thole pins; and at "Give way!" the oars bit the surface as one machine, and the boat gathered way.

"Good luck!" shouted Sir George from the rail, and Miss Chesterman with moist eyes waved an atom of handkerchief, and the black retriever swung a thoughtful tail. Captain Kettle waved in return, and then his eyes sought a lower level and ran over two or three of the round cabin portholes. Apparently he saw what he sought for there, for he waved again, and, lifting his nose, fancied he scented in the air the faint trace of the frangipanni which Miss Dubbs affected for her toilette.

The watchers followed the surf-boat with their eyes till night snapped down with tropical suddenness; and as at the same time the steamer's lights were kindled and dazzled the eye, the boat vanished into the gloom which had come down to cover the sea.

Violet Chesterman shivered. "I believe I'm afraid," she said. "Anyway, it's quite a new feeling, and I can't think what else it can be."

"Then you ought to be rather pleased," was the brotherly retort, "as I suppose you mean it's a new and therefore pleasurable sensation for you. In the meanwhile, if you're thinking of yourself, I've reason to believe that the ship is being efficiently looked after by what's his name—oh, yes, Trethewy, the mate. I can't imagine your fears are on behalf of our excellent skipper. He strikes me as a man one couldn't get killed however much one tried. So come along down to dinner. That unfortunate steward has been banging that tin pan he calls a gong this half-hour back. Look here, Violet, I'll bet you a pair of gloves that, as Kettle's out of the way, that Scotch engineer takes us under his kind patronage, and that his own official chief looks blue murder at him, but under the baleful glance of your distinguished eye eats his victuals in respectful silence."

"Pooh," said Miss Chesterman, "you don't provide yourself with gloves at my expense by obvious tricks like that. Kindly remember I had the advantage of being introduced to Mr. McTodd's little ways long before you had the felicity of his acquaintance."

BUT Mr. McTodd, as it happened, was not in the saloon when the pair sat themselves down to table. He was in the alleyway outside the steward's pantry, commenting to Miss Dubbs on the pleasantness of the night, the real smoothness of the sea (in spite of the deceptive look of heavy swell) and the general desirableness of boat trips.

"A junk like this," said Mr. McTodd, "unless very efficiently looked after in the engineroom, always strikes me as here and there unsafe. But for real security give me a sound, diagonal-teak-built surf-boat, with just enough leak in her seams to keep her sweet. You can't sink a craft like that. You may even fling her ashore if you like, and with a bit of strength you can get her off again, equal to new. And with biscuit and a fair wind and a small keg of whisky, you can go round the world in her. Weel, I was going into supper—dinner I should say—but I've lost my appetite. I've been packing glands all day, and the smell's injurious to the mucous membrane. I'd take it as kind if you'd join me in a *pasear* along the lower deck."

The trade wind freshened till it blew a gale, and the little *Wongaroo*, a small speck in that great turmoil of water, with her

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engines slowed down till they just held her in position, rolled and bucked and plunged and pitched, till more than one expert thought that she would heave her masts overboard. Everything on board of her, from coals and shovels to dinner plates and hairbrushes, kept up its own separate noisy dance, and even the most hardened of her human complement was nauseated with her dizzy lunging.

"A man," said Mr. McTodd, as he placed thermometric fingers on the thrust-block bearings to make sure that the racing propeller-shaft was not heating them unduly, "a man would need the bowels of a sea gull to stand this sort of merry-go-round unmoved. I wish one of those poets who blether about the cradle of the deep would come below here and try the effect of being rocked in the cradle of this three by five shaft-tunnel."

"Those that go down to the sea in steamships," said the chief engineer, "see the wonders of the deep. McTodd, I'll trouble you to come out of that rabbit run and give me a hand with this condenser. She's coughing like a sick Hindoo again, and I expect the mate'd have a fit if I told him we were within an inch of a break-down any minute, and he'd better make his preparations to heave to under sail. Be careful, man, now. I'd hate to have you inconvenience me by getting killed by that walking-beam."

Night dragged through, and day came, and still the reinforced Trade blew with unabated force, and the little steamboat continued her dizzy dance. The wind blew hot now instead of chill, and presently (as the sun climbed higher) gave one the idea that it had been passed through a superheating apparatus before it was let loose on the *Wongaroo*. It was laden, too, with a fine grit which lodged in all the steamer's crannies on deck and below, in the morning coffee, in the eyes, in the bearings of the machinery, in Miss Chesterman's back hair, in the apple tart which the cook baked for luncheon, and (this most emphatically) in the innermost mechanism of everybody's temper.

But when at last the blazing afternoon drew to a close, the wind eased and the sandstorm dropped; and on the edge of night the surf-boat was sighted putting out from behind a shoulder of the land.

It seemed to the women who watched that no small boat could live in that run of sea, but she held stolidly on, her oars, like the legs of some uncouth insect, beating the water rhythmically. The faces of her people, when they came near enough to be seen, were woodenly unconcerned, and when the acrobatic feat of getting her alongside, hooking on, and hauling her up to davits had to be performed, one might have taken it (from the looks of the actors) to be an ordinary concern of every-day life, instead of one of the smartest pieces of sea juggling on record.

"My ——, Skipper," said Sir George, "you've given us all a bad fright! I never thought you'd get on board again in one piece. The sea's awful!"

"I take the sea as I find it, sir, and don't complain. My boat crew's passably efficient. I will say that for them."

"Well," said Sir George, rather piqued, "if we were sick with anxiety, I'd like to point out you don't look too brisk yourself. You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"If there were such things, I'd have seen one surely. We've found your steamboat, sir. You remember her name?"

"You've found her, have you? Well now, that's capital hearing, and almost worth all we've gone through. Her name, do you say? Was it washed out or something? Her name? I suppose I must have come across it somewhere. It wasn't in Fred's letter, of course. Oh no, I remember my solicitors dug it out for me. But I'm afraid I've forgotten it. I've a rotten memory for names. However, if it's of importance we can easily turn it up. I've got their letter amongst the other papers in my dispatch box down in my room."

"I can tell you her name, sir. She's the old *Norman Towers*. Her master, Captain Farnish, with his wife, brought me up from the time I was a little kid of two years old, and those two were about the best friends I had got in the world, and better friends than most men ever had. Captain Farnish, I suppose, is drowned, and, seeing what's happened to his ship, that's the best thing that could occur to him. But as for ghosts, if there were such things, I should have seen his when I went on board. In the chart-house there was a red velvet chair with a castor off that I've known for years, and the old lady's portrait, and his pipe—his frowsy old meerschaum pipe—I say his pipe—sir, I mean his pipe—if you'll excuse me I will go to my room. I feel I need a bit of sleep."

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CHAPTER XVIII

DISENGAGEMENT

"I'M DREADFULLY sorry," said Sir George next morning, "that I didn't think of telling you the steamer's name. It didn't seem to me important, and in fact, as I've told you, I forgot it. I knew, of course, the details of my sister's escapade when she met you first, but the names of the boats never came into the tale; one was German and the other British, and that's all the details I got; and until you returned aboard here off that ghastly surf-boat and scared us all out of our wits last night, she'd never had the curiosity to inquire the name of the ship my unlucky cousin had interested us in. It all sounds perfectly impossible, of course——"

"But as you know by this time," Miss Chesterman cut in, "what a dear old muddler my brother is over business matters, I'm sure you'll understand how it came about."

"Miss," said Captain Kettle, "and sir, I'm grateful for what you say. I was a good deal upset last night. But I don't see that even if I'd known that it was the poor old *Towers* we were after it would have made any real difference. With the knowledge in my pocket I couldn't have looked for her more keenly, nor would my duty to my owner have made me look less hard, and there you are. I should have taken on the billet just the same, and glad of it, even if you'd told me the old girl's name that first night at the Mason's Arms, back there in Foston. It's been a jar to find that my old sea-daddy's drowned, and me thinking him sailing the seas, with his false teeth in the chart-room drawer as merry as ever; but I guess sailors are paid to drown when necessary, and there, if you please, we'll leave it. Question now is, taking this steamboat in through those reefs. It's going to be a job and a half."

"Can't you manage it?"

"Sir, with respect, I can take any steamboat that's built through any channel where there's water enough to float her. But when I'm put to being my own pilot, I've got to survey the channel first."

"But surely you know the way now, after being in and out?"

"There's a vast difference, miss, between dodging through in a row-boat that will float in two feet of water, and taking in a fine craft like this"—Captain Kettle cast his eye proudly over his small command—"that draws thirteen foot two. There must be a channel somewhere, because, as you know, the old *Towers* blew in without touching. But the whole place is a regular stone-yard, and I tell you freely that how my surf-boat escaped getting smashed a good score of times beats all my experience."

"Is there such a thing as a tide here?"

"Water runs in places like a mill-race, sir."

"Presumably the *Norman Towers* must have gone under, over or through the reefs. Perhaps when my cousin was here it was the top of a Spring tide that helped her over."

"That would help, of course. But my idea is there's a proper fairway, and there's nothing to do but take the ground, square by square, in that surf-boat and plot out the whole scheme of the banks and reefs with as many cross bearings as one can get. Then, with some leading marks built ashore and perhaps a buoy or two if the channels get very twisted, I'll be able, if the weather gives us a fair smooth, to take her in."

"And how long will this entertainment take?"

"A week, sir, at the very lowest estimate, and perhaps two if it breezes up again. If it comes to narrow soundings, a man can't get accurate depths when he doesn't know if the sea's lifting them a couple of fathoms above the normal or dropping him twelve feet beneath it."

"Good heavens, Skipper, you can't expect us to stay and be seasick here for another mortal week!"

"I was going to say, sir, that we're low on coal, and have made a big hole in the water and stores. It would be best if you'd take the *Wongaroo* back to the Islands for bunkers and provisions. You'll be back here again before I'm ready. And you'll find Mr. Trethewy a perfectly competent navigator, and you'll not miss the six men I want to keep."

"And leave you here to grill in that two-penny boat? My dear fellow, that comes inside the cruelty clause. We couldn't sleep for thinking of you. Don't you agree, Violet?"

"I shall take along a spare awning and a couple of spars to make a tent, and I marked down in my eye an island that's just the place for a camp. There didn't seem to be

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fuel, so we shall need a couple of bags of coal, but with those and rations we shall be comfortable enough till you return, and indeed, sir, if you come to think the business out, there's no other way for it."

So the scheme was agreed to, and Kettle fitted his boat and went below to say good-by to Miss Dubbs before making his adieu to her employers on deck.

But that stately young person gave him a very chilly reception. She was vastly civil, one might almost say offensively so, but so far as a temperature of some eighty-three degrees Fahrenheit would permit, her conversation was ice.

A sentence or two passed before Captain Kettle observed this. As has been recorded before, their mode of addressing each other was always elegantly formal, and at first he thought that the lady's remarks were built on this model, and not studiously designed to denote offence.

But presently she left him beyond possible doubt as to her meaning.

"I would have you understand, Captain, that I am not your dear, or anything so familiar. To you I am either 'Miss Dubbs' or 'Stewardess,' which you prefer."

"I told you in Las Palmas harbor, how awkward it would be if we were serving together on the same ship, and I was Captain."

"You did, and it has been very awkward. I felt I intruded, though Miss Violet, to give her her due, never let me see she thought so. However when the pair of you get back to the *Norman Towers* you will be able to renew old scenes."

"I might have told you before about meeting her out West," said Kettle miserably, "but I thought that was all past and done with, and never expected to see her again. As you know, it was a perfect surprise to me her coming to Grand Canary. You were a surprise too, for that matter."

Miss Dubbs' elaborate black hair seemed fairly to bristle. "Ah, now we get to the truth, Captain! I was a surprise, if you like. Plain indeed it was you didn't expect to see me, and you never disguised your disappointment. I was the little intruder, wasn't I, and you thought you were going to pick it up again with Miss Violet where you'd left it off, and play her the Moonlight Sonata on the accordion when Sir George was having his after-supper sleep? Oh, don't tell me! Haven't I seen you walking her out along the decks and catching her by the elbow when she made believe she was losing her footing through the roll? Liver wing at dinner, and 'Quartermaster, bring aft a deckchair for Miss Chesterman;' that's all right. That's her due. That's what you're paid for. But when it comes to pipeclaying her white shoes with your own fingers, that's the limit. It's no use denying it. I saw you at 'em through your own porthole. Even a stewardess must come on deck sometimes."

"I deny nothing that I have done. I pipeclayed the shoes because the steward can't do it decently and won't learn. I'll clean yours too, if you'll let me."

"No one touches my shoes but my husband, which is what you'll never be. Here's your engagement ring."

"You'd better keep it."

"If you'd prefer I should give it to the other girl instead of to you, just say so. Pah!" said Miss Dubbs, swelling out her chest, "you can't think how I despise you, Captain. No, don't try to stop me. I'm going to my room."

It was then, with the dismal knowledge that the matter of his engagement had gone hopelessly awry, that Captain Kettle in a surf-boat laden with men, coal-bags, meat-tins, water-beakers, biscuit-sacks, rifles, rope, ammunition, canvas, sounding leads, and other cargo put off from the *Wongaroo*, which forthwith turned her tail upon him and steamed away to sea. Twelve very strenuous days passed over his head before he was able to rejoin her.

TO BE CONTINUED

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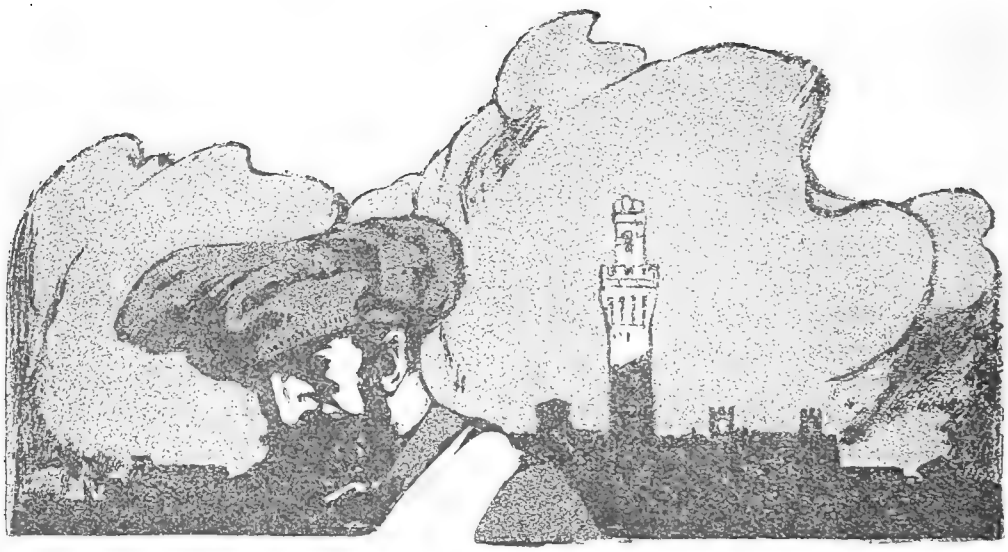

The Poisoned Peril

A "Sir John Hawkwood" Story

By Marion Polk Angellotti

IN A LIFE like mine, the life of a soldier of fortune and a mercenary, there are strange vicissitudes and sharp contrasts. I have gone hungry, and I have feasted off gold plate; I have been near to selling the armor off my back, and I have flourished in plumes and gems and cloth of silver. But one thing has always stood unchanged at my elbow, and that has been peril. It has been with me day and night for so long that it has become a friend, and should it ever leave me, half the savor of my existence would be like to depart with it.

All the sweetest things of my life have come mixed with danger. Even on my marriage-day—I will tell that tale some time when I am in the mood—in the midst of a blissful contentment so great that I thought myself beyond the power of man to touch me, a craven plot came near to ending my war-waging forever. And I recall another adventure, one which at the time was to me but a jest and a bit of play-acting, and which I discovered afterward to have masked a peril as real and deadly as any I had faced in all my days.

It was not so long ago, this affair, for it came to pass in my later years, when my fortunes were established and my name was famous, and duchies and principalities sued for peace with the land which had hired me.

I was Captain-General of the Republic of Florence; I was wealthy and honored; I dwelt near the Arno in a villa as splendid as a king's palace. Nevertheless I was still a soldier, and in the midst of my luxury I found that nothing gave me a livelier pleasure than the occasional breaking out of a brawl between Florence and some of her neighbors, in which I might draw my sword.

Such a diversion was vouchsafed me when Siena quarreled with the Florentines, but it ended all too soon in our complete victory, and then I found myself obliged to spend a month or more in the conquered town, determining with its council the terms of peace, a business for which I had little aptitude and less liking.

Notwithstanding this, I did my best, and

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fulfilled my mission by ruthlessly insisting that everything desired by Florence should be granted—a mode of proceeding perhaps not very diplomatic, but extremely satisfactory, I found, to those I served. In the end, the council asked for a week of grace to consider my demands. To this I assented, though I told them plainly enough that should they, on the seventh day, refuse my terms, on the eighth there would be little left of their city; and they spent the time of truce in entertaining me at a series of splendid festivals, hoping thereby to soften me and win me over to an easier pact.

I was none too fond of banquets and hunts and masques, presided over by men who detested me cordially and had some work to hide it, but I endured the affliction with as good grace as I might, while to my household of aides and lieutenants the round of gaieties seemed to prove anything but disagreeable.

They entered into the life of the place with zest, swore friendship with their late foes, and made fervent love to the ladies, while I looked on with amusement and found especial diversion in the antics of two of them, a pair of young Florentines who had been mad to see service and had therefore sought and obtained my permission to join my forces.

They were of houses as good as any in Florence, these lads, and were handsome and gay and courageous. I had been wont to believe them keen-witted, too; but that I began to doubt when, after scarce four and twenty hours in Siena, they both proceeded to lose their hearts utterly to the daughter of old Giovanni Vasari.

MADONNA COSTANZA, to be sure, was quite lovely enough to bring any man to her feet—a slender girl, dark-eyed, very pale, and crowned with the red-gold hair one sometimes sees in Italy. Since the gods had given her beauty, I suppose they saw no need to bestow on her a mind as well. At any rate, they did not, for I once spoke with her at a banquet and found her far too featherheaded for my taste. She was a rare coquette too, and played her lovers one against another, smiling one day on Ridolfo di San Gaetano, then ignoring him and beaming on young Maurizio Bardi, till both were in despair.

As for her father, had my lieutenants been in a state to consider the matter rationally, they would have known well enough that he would see her dead before he would give her in marriage to either of them. He was a firebrand, that man. Throughout the war he had fought like any demon; later, at the council, he had stood firm against peace, declaring openly that he would rather see the town in ruins than have her yield to Florence; and now that he was overruled, his rage and bitterness were so great that it drove him well-nigh mad to meet me daily and be forced to greet me with civility. As to my lieutenants, he liked them no better, and it was in my mind that they ran no little risk of a sudden death when they went to his house to serenade his daughter and sit at her feet in the court.

All young men must play the fool at some time, however, and after one vain effort to enlighten them I wasted no more thought on the affair. But I was sorry that, with a whole city from which to choose, they must needs lose their hearts to the same woman, for it was plain their friendship could not stand against their jealousy. They exchanged scowls now instead of smiles, and there were days when they would scarce address each other. Unless I deceived myself greatly they were hovering on the very brink of a quarrel.

The crisis came, strangely enough, at the house of old Vasari himself, at a festival to which he had invited me and my aides for the excellent reason that he dared not do otherwise. And I had gone, not, I fear, from any great desire to attend, but because it amused me to goad the old rogue into fury and watch him struggle between hate and prudence. Well, if this was not very creditable to me, I came near to getting my deserts that day!

The afternoon was a tiresome one enough. Throughout it I was surrounded by men who smiled on me and flattered me and who would, as I was perfectly aware, have all but sold their souls to see me drop dead before them. Unbearably weary of their chatter, I finally escaped and took refuge on a balcony, only to find myself run to earth there by a certain Della Casa, a member of the council, and a good-natured, simple, peace-at-all-price sort of old man, who declined to be drawn into the quarrels of others and had always treated me with a friendliness which I almost believed was genuine.

"Aha, Sir John," he chuckled, on perceiving me, "and what are you doing here,

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pray? Are you searching the house for those young hotheads of yours, the pair of handsome Florentines? Then I can tell you where to find them, for I was present when the challenge was given——"

"The challenge!" I repeated, staring.

"What! have you not heard?" he cried, delighted at such a chance for gossip. "It happened in this way. Madonna Costanza, our host's daughter, had been coquetting through all the afternoon with your lieutenants, driving them near to frenzy, and when at last the music began, behold, it appeared that she had promised each of them to step the dance with him! That is the way of maids all the world over, eh, Sir John? Well, and then she would not choose between them, but smiled and sighed, and looked first at one and then at the other.

"Hot words passed between them, the quarrel grew, and then Messer Vasari chanced to come by. He told your young men that his festival must not be marred by brawling, but that if the affair were one of honor and pressed for settlement they might finish it in the garden behind his house, and that he would lend them weapons. So now they have gone out to fight, and all of us are agog to know which will prove victor. A merry adventure, is it not?"

"You think so?" I asked blackly. "And you hold it a fitting and seemly thing that Messer Vasari should arrange a duel beneath his own roof, between two young fools who have quarreled over his own daughter?"

He blinked at me pacifically. "Aye, it is a bit strange, indeed," he admitted. "But, after all, it may be that no harm will follow. We have been young ourselves, eh, Sir John Hawkwood?"

Undeniably we had, but this obvious fact did not incline me to regard the matter with any especial patience. I was angered, too, at old Vasari, for I knew well enough that he had arranged this meeting in the fervent hope of seeing two of the Florentines he hated cut each other's throats. Well, perhaps I might yet be in time to foil his pretty scheme. Unceremoniously quitting Della Casa, I left the balcony and hastened within.

MY KNOWLEDGE of Vasari's house was of the vaguest, but persistence works wonders, and by dint of opening every door I encountered and following every passage, I emerged at last into the arcaded garden at the rear—and emerged none too soon, for in another moment the duel would have begun!

There, confronting each other with flushed, angry faces, were San Gaetano and Bardi, each holding one of the gold-hilted and bejeweled swords so obligingly provided by the master of the dwelling. There was Vasari himself, and three kindred spirits whom he had called in to aid him as his seconds.

The noise of my sudden advent caused our worthy host to pause in the very act of opening his mouth to give the signal. All the members of the party turned their gaze on me where I stood just across the threshold, and their expressions of astonishment and dismay were as gratifyingly complete as I could have wished.

Giving them no time to recover, I strode across and confronted them.

"Well, now, signori, and what does this mean?" I said sternly, ignoring Vasari and his friends, and fixing my eyes on my discomfited lieutenants. "I had thought that my orders against dueling within the walls of Sienna were most plain. We are all in danger of our lives here, you know that, and I have no mind to have my men cutting each other's throats at a time like this. May I ask why you have chosen to ignore the commands I gave?"

For an instant the two had looked more like a pair of schoolboys than the gallant soldiers they had proved themselves in the late campaign; but now they made a brave effort at recovery.

"We are here to settle a quarrel, Sir John," was the brilliant explanation with which Maurizio Bardi favored me.

"Here is news indeed, when I find you facing each other with swords in your hands! Do you think I have no eyes in my head?" I retorted. "It is the wherefore of your quarrel that I am asking, and faith, I am growing weary of waiting for an answer!"

Old Messer Vasari began to laugh behind his palm and to whisper with the man next him. I have not a doubt his aim was to irritate my lieutenants beyond bearing, and if so he must have been pleased with his success, for they both turned scarlet and promptly lost their tempers.

"Indeed, Sir John," said young San Gaetano, with his head held very high, "we had not known that Florentine gentle-

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men might not settle their affairs of honor without the permission of an Englishman, however great and powerful he may chance to be!"

"Then you shall learn it now," said I, grimly, "for I am commander of this force, and what I order shall be carried out, if I must put you both under arrest to accomplish it! Come, I have wasted time enough. Will you both give me your word that the matter shall end here?"

They would not, nor had I hoped it since that laugh of Vasari's. Bardi scowled and beat the ground with his foot, and as for San Gaetano——

"I never heard," drawled that scapegrace, with perfect composure, "that Sir John Hawkwood himself was particularly long-suffering, or was given to deferring the quarrels which occasionally he has been known to have with his foes!"

It was a sharp enough thrust, that, but I was in no mood for repartee, and my fingers itched to cuff the young insolent who had made it.

"When you have been fighting as long as I have," I retorted, "maybe you will be a general, and then you can suit yourself. At present, you are under my orders, and unless you obey them you will find yourself facing a sword a good deal more dangerous than that of Bardi there!"

Well, the lad was no coward, for he smiled and made me a low bow.

"I am sure," he said with the utmost courtesy, "that either Messer Bardi or myself would desire no greater honor than to cross swords with one so famous as our Captain-General!"

Now that was ridiculous, for he knew perfectly well that I could have killed him as easily as a fly; but it was gallant too, and softened me. Moreover, it gave me an idea, and I was desperately in need of one. To be sure, I could easily have prevented the quarrel from proceeding at present, but I knew that any such patched peace would be most unlikely to last a minute after the pair were out of my sight. Nor did I want to place them under guard, for they were useful to me. What I wished was to end their feud permanently, and now I fancied I had found a way to do it.

"Well," said I to San Gaetano, "you shall be gratified, then! And lest Bardi should feel that I am neglecting him, I will fight him too. Come, both of you—I am waiting." And I unsheathed my sword and raised it in the salute.

They stood staring at me blankly.

"Why, Sir John," Bardi stammered, "what do you mean?"

"It is simple enough," I explained. "Since my skill at sword-play is greater than either of you can muster singly, I will fight the pair of you. If I get so much as a scratch in the conflict, then I will hold that you have bested me, and I will take myself back into the house and leave you here to end your quarrel as may seem best to you. But if, instead, I wound you both, and disarm you to boot, then you will obey my orders and clasp hands and resume your old friendship. Well, do you agree, or must I think that you fear to face me even with the odds on your side?"

AS I ended, my gaze chanced to rest on Messer Vasari for an instant, and I caught in his eyes a flash of delight that astonished me—for heaven knows what there was in my proposition that could give him pleasure. Not troubling myself about the riddle, I looked back at Bardi and San Gaetano. For a little they continued to stare at me, and then both of them broke into a delighted laugh in which the last vestige of their ill-temper vanished.

"To be sure we agree, Sir John!" Bardi cried, "and if the pair of us get under your guard, it will give us cause for boasting till our dying day!"

"Then let us at it," I said briefly, and gave the word.

In the course of my life I had often enough fought two men, yes, and a dozen; but to-day the circumstances were somewhat unusual. I had left youth behind me now, and even middle age, and with them, something of my agility and suppleness, though my iron strength bid fair to remain with me to the end. Pitted against me were two lads who were uncommonly strong and clever fencers, and to whom—for I was not a little fond of them both—I had, in the past few months, taught the greater part of the thrusts and feints that had made me famous. Yet, in despite of the odds, I knew that the advantage was, in truth, on my side, for in sword-play, as in all other things, there are a few who possess what is called genius; and of these

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few I am one. Had I desired it, I could have killed Bardi and San Gaetano.

The difficulty of the whole affair lay in the fact that I did not desire to kill them, though I was far from averse to the idea of giving to each of them a wound that would remind him for some time to come of the folly of setting himself against my authority. If all went as I planned, I would pink San Gaetano's shoulder prettily, and give Bardi a not too deep slash in the arm. Three or four days spent in nursing their wounds would do them no harm—would perhaps cool their blood and divert their minds from the too lovely eyes of Madonna Costanza.

Yes, I knew exactly what I wished to do, but I was not so sure that I could succeed; for if any man says that it is an easy thing to wound an opponent and yet run no risk at all of hurting him seriously, then that man has a scanty knowledge indeed of the art of fencing. And when you have two antagonists instead of one, the matter becomes even more difficult.

Knowing this, I am inclined to set the fencing-bout that followed high among my triumphs.

We stormed back and forth across the garden, parrying, circling, feinting. A hail of steel seemed to fall about my head; the whole air seemed alive with the flash of the splendid weapons that menaced me. The lads were in a frenzy of enthusiasm. To them this was a delightful game, and they would have given all their earthly goods to win it. They called to mind all the thrusts they knew, all the tricks I had taught them, and used them with a dash and fire such as I had seldom seen. A dozen times they were near to having me.

Once San Gaetano's point passed within an inch of my throat, and had I not thrust the blade back with a circular parry my race would have been run then and there. Bardi, too, gave me a sharp start when, under cover of a play of his comrade's, he feinted low and then rose straight for my breast in a Spanish dart that has brought death to many a good fencer. I intercepted it, but not a moment too soon; and all this, as you may believe, was beginning to prove something of a strain.

Moreover, Messer Vasari and his friends were following the conflict with noisy interest, and, busy as I was, I could not help but be aware that their sentiments were decidedly against me—a fact which naturally made me the more determined to win. Our host especially, it struck me, showed a good deal more eagerness for my defeat than was necessary, and manifested as much by continual appeals to my lieutenants.

"Nay, come, signori!" he shouted again and again. "Surely you have not yet done your best? What! two to one, and still you can not conquer? Shall it be said, then, that a single Englishman can dispose so easily of a pair of Italians?"

He continued much more to the same purpose, until my patience was exhausted.

"Ho there, Messer Vasari," said I, through the clash of steel, "if you really wish to see me touched, you are going the wrong way about it. Your chatter distracts the lads a good deal more than it does me—I was near to putting my sword through San Gaetano's wrist then, and after that he would have been most unlikely to perforate me as you appear to wish!"

I HAD let my attention wander a very little from the matter in hand as I indulged in this defiance, and my lack of discretion came near to being the end of me, for Bardi chose that very instant to execute one of my own favorite thrusts, and his point passed so closely along my shoulder that it pierced a fold of my doublet. Delighted, he made a gasping noise of triumph, which found its echo in an exultant shout from Vasari; but they had rejoiced too soon, for I was not even scratched.

However, I realized that the conflict had gone far enough now and might as well end, and I began to look seriously for a way to finish it. By this time we had all three fought ourselves into an excellent humor. The excitement of battle and the really brilliant fencing of the lads, due in great part, I knew, to my teaching, and therefore flattering to my vanity, had banished my annoyance completely. As for them, they were in the highest spirits, though panting and almost exhausted; and San Gaetano was even laughing breathlessly.

"Sir John will best us in the end, of course, Maurizio," he cried to his comrade, "but it has been worth a sword-cut, eh? Watch your guard now, the end is near!"

A remark which did credit to his foresight, for, almost on the last word, I attempted one of the most difficult of my thrusts, succeeded in it, and had the satis-

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faction of seeing his sword rise into the air, describe a circle and fall clattering on the pavement at a distance of some ten feet.

In the doing of this I had cut his arm, even as I had intended, but the wound was plainly not deep; for he paid it no attention beyond shaking off the blood, and continued to watch the conflict eagerly, exhorting Bardi to stand against me to the uttermost. Now that I had but one opponent, the game was in my own hands, and it was not long before I disarmed him by the very *coup* I had practised on his friend; whereupon they left their swords lying where they had fallen, and advanced upon me with such an exuberantly generous delight in the skill of their conqueror as none but born soldiers could have felt.

"A miracle, your sword-play, Sir John!" young San Gaetano babbled, seizing my hand and wringing it, and incidentally bedaubing it with his gore. "Never, never have I had such an hour! I will remember it when I am old, when I can no longer hold a weapon——"

He broke off suddenly, staring across my shoulder, and I wheeled about and followed his gaze with mine.

Madonna Costanza was standing behind us, her hands tragically clasped, her long lashes wet, tears running down her cheeks. Little as I liked her, and annoyed as I was at her for having caused all this turmoil by her coquetry, I must have been blind to have denied that, in her affliction, she made a most beautiful sight. And if her appearance wrung this admission from me, judge what effect it was likely to have on a pair of young hotheads who fancied themselves in love with her! San Gaetano and Bardi, who had each had an arm about the other's neck, suddenly drew apart and glanced at each other with looks not far from hostile. Determined to have no more foolery, I was about to remind them of their promise, when the girl saved me the trouble of speech.

"Oh, praise the Virgin, praise the saints!" she cried tearfully. "I watched your duel from the window, signori, and wept, and prayed as I never prayed before! Had one of you fallen, what would I have done? For your blood would have been on my hands, spilled through my wickedness——"

"Your wickedness, madonna?" young Bardi stammered, round-eyed.

And I confess that I felt some curiosity myself. Was she, then, really in love with one of my lieutenants?

"Yes, yes," she sobbed, "I have been wicked, I have been heartless. Signori, I have lured you, I have smiled first on one of you and then on the other, I have broken your old friendship and driven you to bloodshed. And why? Have you ever asked yourselves, signori, why I have acted as I did?"

That they had, day and night. Indeed, they had done little else; but at present they were too intent on her coming revelations to make an answer at all.

"Signori," she told them wofully, "I am, in truth, much to blame! I have encouraged you not from fondness, but merely from a desire to awaken the jealousy of Messer Alano Cassioli, to whom I have been betrothed for a year, as you must have known before this had you not been strangers in Siena. He is fickle, this gentleman, and of late he has been spending much time with Madonna Giovanna, Messer Marzi's daughter—imagine it, she who has always feigned to be my friend! So I thought to show him that I, too, could divert myself with others. And it has succeeded well, my ruse." She smiled bewitchingly through her tears. "He has returned to me, he has told me that Giovanna's face is to mine as a star to the sun! But nevertheless I am very wicked, for I have put discord between you and caused you to risk your lives!"

MY TWO lieutenants were gazing on her in dumb horror. As for me, though in days to come I had many a hearty laugh over the recollection of their faces, I confess that just then I failed to enjoy the jest. We had all three been playing with death during the past half-hour; a slight swerving of a blade, a slip, a stumble, and one of us might never have wielded sword again. And now it appeared that we had fought for a girl already betrothed to a man of whom none of us had ever heard! The knowledge was too much for me, and, turning to Bardi and San Gaetano, I told them briefly and forcibly what I thought of the whole affair.

By the time I had ended, they were beginning to recover themselves.

"Faith, Sir John, we can scarce gainsay you," San Gaetano murmured, still a trifle dazed, "for, as I understand it, there have surely never been on earth two fools as great as we!"

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With a mighty effort he pulled himself together, and approached Madonna Costanza with an air of gallantry that, all the circumstances being considered, did him the utmost credit.

"Madonna," he said, bowing low to her, "pray give not another thought to this! We are but too happy, my friend and I, to find that by our hopeless devotion to you we have had the honor to do you some slight service."

"And if you will permit us to escort you within-doors," Bardi concluded for him with great courtesy, "we will beg you to present us to this Messer Cassioli, that we may congratulate him as the most fortunate man in all Siena!"

They disappeared from the garden, one of them on either side of the lady, whose tears were already things of the past. And as they vanished I saw them exchange across her lovely head a glance which told me that their old friendship reigned once more between them.

No doubt because the excitement of the battle still lingered in my veins, it now occurred to me that I would like a word with Messer Giovanni Vasari on the subject of the extreme anxiety he had shown to see me conquered by my two lieutenants, and I turned to confront him, wondering, as I did so, why he had taken no share in the scene of his daughter's confession. A glance sufficed to solve this mystery. Vasari and his friends had apparently melted into thin air, and save for myself the garden was deserted.

"Very good!" I muttered to myself, not to be balked, "I will go within-doors and run him to earth."

And I strode into the house.

To find any one man in a scene of festivity is like looking for a needle in a haystack. I searched the crowded hall in vain, and then began to explore the rooms that flanked it on left and right. The greater part of these proved to be empty; but in the last of them, to my annoyance, I found myself face to face with that old busybody, Della Casa.

To my surprise, however, he did not halt me and demand an account of how I had dealt with the duel he had called to my notice. All his attention was focussed raptly on the wall above the great chimney-place, a spot where I quite failed to perceive anything remarkable.

"Never, Sir John, never in all my life until to-day have I seen that wall as it is now!" he began, the moment he caught sight of me. "But where have they gone, then? What has become of them?"

"Become of what?" I asked carelessly, glancing about the room to see if Vasari lurked concealed there.

"Of the swords," he cried, "the swords that have hung there for a hundred years? Our host declares that they are heirlooms, and tells romantic stories of them to all his guests, but he does not relate what people whisper is the true tale! Will you hear it? An ancestor of Messer Vasari, and it appears a none too agreeable person, was the first to wield them. He used them when he fought his enemies, and in the end a rumor grew ever louder and louder in Siena that when he touched a foe with his blade the man died within the hour—yes, though the scratch had been no deeper than a pinprick! The swords were poisoned, you understand. Why, Sir John, what is amiss?"

He might well ask, for I was gaping at him with wide eyes and a fallen mouth.

"Della Casa," I cried, "did they have gold hilts, those swords? Were they crusted with jewels, great rubies and emeralds?"

"To be sure," he nodded. "You have seen them, then?"

YES, I had seen them. And, moreover, I was no longer puzzled as to why Giovanni Vasari had beneath his own roof arranged a duel between my young lieutenants, and provided them with weapons for the bout. They were of the best houses of the Florence he hated, Bardi and San Gaetano. To set them face to face, each armed with a poisoned sword, to be sure of the horrible death of at least one of them—this had filled him with a triumph no less than devilish.

And what must have been his delight when I appeared upon the scene of action and pitted myself against the two young men? If he had wished to kill my lieutenants, how much more would he have rejoiced to rid the world of Sir John Hawkwood, the soldier who had conquered Siena and humbled her to the dust!

For a brief instant I closed my eyes, recalling how the two lads, drunk with the joy of fighting, had pressed madly on me with the poisoned weapons, a touch of

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which would have sealed my doom. I remembered how the steel had seemed to hail about me, how one thrust had passed close to my cheek and another just above my wrist; how Bardi, laughing in delighted triumph, had pierced a fold of my doublet with his blade. Had he struck an inch deeper, I would have left my bones to bleach in a hostile city, and would never again have ridden home to the Florentine villa where the noblest and most beautiful lady in Italy was waiting for my return!

Very rapidly these reflections succeeded each other in my mind, and it is perhaps not surprising that, at their conclusion, I found my desire for that word with Messer Vasari to be considerably heightened. Stepping out into the hall, I detained a passing servant.

"Go to your master," I bade him, "and say that Sir John Hawkwood demands speech with him at once."

The interview, I regret to say, was fated never to take place. For a long time the servant was absent, and when he did at last return he informed me that Messer Vasari had but just received an urgent message from a neighboring town, and had been forced, much as he regretted such a discourtesy to his guests, to betake himself hurriedly out of Siena.

I fancy that, instead of quitting the city, he sheltered himself behind the walls of some faithful friend's house. Be this as it may, he vanished as if the earth had swallowed him up, and whatever his sanctuary, he did not emerge from it until the peace-pact had been concluded and my lieutenants and I were safely back in Florence.

The Secret of Hell

by Theodore Goodridge Roberts

PAUL FLEMMING put his cue in the rack and walked over to one of the rear windows of the Planters' Club. He looked out at the Careenage and the crowded shipping of Bridgetown, Barbadoes. A white mail-boat lay at anchor in the roadstead. Closer in, the wharves were astir with life, in spite of the noonday heat. A barkentine from Newfoundland was discharging drums of fish, and a Nova Scotia schooner was taking in molasses. Half-way between the club and the shipping, a man sat on a packing-case and smoked a cigarette. He was clothed in soiled linen, his hat was shapeless and his feet were bare. Flemming's roving eye found him and settled upon him.

"By gad!" exclaimed Flemming. "Remarkable looking man, whoever he is."

Flemming idly left the club and, as he

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passed, took a closer look at the gentleman in soiled linen reclining on the packing-case. Hair and mustache showed a decided kinkiness. Hands and feet disclosed a strong strain of African blood. One eye was cocked; and the nose, which had looked so well from the window, showed a puff and purple suggestive of rum.

"Hot day," Flemming remarked casually.

"Hot?" queried the other. "My dear sir, it is quite evident to me that you have never been in Hell."

"Right you are. I haven't," returned Flemming with a chuckle.

"I am not referring to the fabulous place of future torments," said the other soberly. "The Hell I speak of is on the coast of Brazil."

"Never heard of it," said Flemming.

"You wouldn't," returned the stranger. "Not likely."

He tossed away a moist and yellow stump of cigarette and accepted a fresh smoke from Flemming's case. His ruddy, brown eyes brightened upon the silver, gold-lined cigarette-case.

"No, you wouldn't likely hear of Hell," he continued in a drawling voice. "Fact is, I named the place myself. I named it Hell, and yet it is to that place that I look for the reëstablishment of my fortunes and position. Perhaps you have heard of Andrew Carnegie?"

"Yes," said Flemming. "Well, rather."

"I don't mean the library man," retorted the stranger, somewhat testily. "I refer to yours truly—to myself—to the ex-merchant of the island of St. Kitts."

"Oh, I beg your pardon."

"Don't mention it. You have heard of me, of course?"

"I fear not. You see, I don't know much about the other islands—the ones to the north. You were a merchant, you say?"

"Prosperous," returned Mr. Carnegie, sitting up straight on the packing-case. "Exporter and importer. Biggest trade on the island. Two thousand pounds in the bank, and look at me now!"

"What happened?" asked Flemming.

"I gave it all away to a common sailorman. Yes, sir, gave it away with both hands to a red-headed son of Erin with an anchor and a dolphin inked in red and blue on his arm. Gave him my business, too. He is running it this minute."

"It doesn't sound reasonable to me," remarked Flemming.

"Reasonable!" exclaimed Andrew. "That's just what it was. He gave me something in return, you may be sure. He gave me the secret of Hell."

"And what is it?" inquired Flemming.

The ex-merchant winked slowly with his cocked eye.

"That knowledge would be worth paying for to a gentleman like you," he said.

Flemming laughed at the pleasantry.

"And did you find it to be worth two thousand pounds?" he asked.

"I haven't found it yet."

He lowered his naked feet to the hot planks of the wharf and slid from the packing-case. He straightened his disreputable hat on his head and yawned.

"Well, I must be off," he said. "If you are interested you'll find me here at nine o'clock this evening."

"Interested?" queried Flemming. "In what?"

"In me and Hell," returned the other with a grin, and slouched away into the town.

Flemming stared after him with something of amusement—but more of resentment—in his eyes.

"Dash his impudence!" he exclaimed. "He's a worthless, cheeky liar. It's a wonder he didn't touch me for a dollar—the price of three or four bottles of rum."

Flemming returned to the club and lunched. He was lonely, for he did not know many people in the island. In the afternoon he hired a horse and rode into the country. Returning to the club, he played poker with three planters, who skinned him unmercifully. He dined at the hotel, played a few games of pool with an "ambassador of commerce," whose specialty was corsets, and finally excused himself and walked out into the narrow streets. He walked aimlessly, thinking of many things. His mind came around to the subject of his noonday talk with the fellow who called himself Andrew Carnegie.

"His cheek was astounding," he reflected, "and he is an amazing liar. I wonder what game he is up to, anyway."

HE HALTED to light his second cigarette since dinner, and by the flare of the match he saw, to his astonishment, that he had wandered down to the water-front and even now stood

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within ten feet of the packing-case upon which he had first caught sight of the gentleman with the cocked eye and bulbous nose.

"The devil!" he exclaimed.

"You are sharp on time," said a voice at his elbow, and Mr. Carnegie appeared and sat down on the packing-case.

"I am here quite by accident," retorted Flemming, "and shall now say good-night to you."

He turned and strode away for half a dozen paces, turned again and saw that the fellow had not followed him. He paused, undecided. The man on the packing-case did not speak.

"After all, he's a queer character," reflected Flemming, and retraced his steps.

"Well, what do you want of me?" he asked.

"My dear sir, I don't want anything of you," returned Andrew.

"Then why did you make an appointment with me to be here at nine o'clock?"

"You are right. To be quite frank, I want five hundred dollars."

Flemming laughed and swung his heavy walking-stick in his hand. Five hundred dollars was the exact sum at that moment reposing in his pocket.

"Come and get it," he invited jeeringly.

"You mistake me," said the other. "I am not a footpad. I am an honest business man and am willing to let you in on a good thing for the price named. Five hundred is all I require, having already spent ten thousand of my own. Five hundred will buy you a half interest in Hell."

"I had no idea that the stock was so high," replied Flemming derisively, eyes and muscles alert.

"That's the price," answered Andrew calmly, "and if you care to take me along to your room in the Ice-House Hotel, I'll be delighted to go into the whole matter with you. I have papers to show you—and the light here is not particularly good."

"I am beginning to lose sight of the joke," said Flemming. "What's all this talk of Hell and five hundred dollars leading to?"

"To the hotel and, eventually, to the place you've just mentioned," replied the gentleman on the packing-case.

"It's likely to be worth the price of two drinks," reflected Flemming. "Come along, Mr. Carnegie," he said aloud. "Follow me."

Flemming ordered drinks. They came; and as soon as the waiter left the room, the man with the cocked eye produced a wad of soiled linen from the front of his shirt. He laid it on the table and tapped it with a finger.

"Here I have the thing for which I paid Mike O'Brien my business and two thousand pounds," he said. "That happened just three months ago. Mike came into my store and began dickering for three suits of silk pajamas and a parrot, just as cool as a gent like yourself might. Naturally, I asked him to show me the color of his money, for I could see at a glance that Mike wasn't even a bosun. He pulled a bunch of yellow money out of his pocket and slapped it down on the counter. It was the real stuff, all stamped with the headpiece of Queen Victoria and George and the Dragon. I locked both doors and sold him all he wanted, mostly liquids.

"Pretty soon he commenced to brag. He said he had nine boxes of the stuff. Well, sir, he drank some more and produced this wad of sailcloth, which he called a map. He'd made it himself. Then he got sentimental, said he'd always wanted to keep a store, particularly one dealing in rum and the like, and tobacco, and offered me his nine boxes of gold for my business and capital. He was drunk; and I've never yet made a deal with a drunken man but I've come out ahead on it. So I closed with him; and here I am and there he is."

"If you have nine boxes of gold what do you want of five hundred dollars?" asked Flemming.

"I have them; and in a sense, I haven't," replied the ex-merchant. "There they lay, easy to see as this here empty glass on the table, under four fathoms of water. Yes, sir, nine stout sea-chests, all a-row on what was the gun-deck of the brig, with the mud of the river around them now and all manner of water-weeds trailing over them. The trouble is to lay my hands on them."

Flemming ordered another long drink for the man with the cocked eye and the nine chests of gold. Then, after the waiter had retired, he laughed.

"This is a very entertaining story, Mr. Carnegie," he said, "but I am not flattered by your opinion of me. Honestly, now, did you expect me to believe such poppycock as that?"

"Certainly not," replied the other. "Why

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should you? Have you the price of a couple of tickets to St. Kitts about you?"

Flemming nodded.

"Then I'd be glad to have you come with me and see Mike O'Brien, and hear the story from his own lips," said the amazing Andrew. "After that, if you have the time, I'll take you to the place I've told you about, Hell by name, and show you the nine chests laying there snug on the oak timbers with the mud and the weeds around them. Mind you, the number of the chests was ten when Mike first found them; but he hoisted one—him and a friend since deceased—and blew the contents. When you believe my story I'll ask you to invest one thousand dollars."

"Why have you doubled the price?" asked Flemming.

"Because a sure thing costs more than a blind chance; and to show that I mean business," returned the other, draining his glass and slipping the wad of linen back into the front of his shirt.

"Hold on. You haven't shown me the map," protested Flemming.

Andrew winked.

"Plenty of time for that," he said.

II

PAUL FLEMMING, scenting adventure, not only accompanied Andrew Carnegie northward to the island of St. Kitts, but paid for both passages. Sure enough, there was the store, and the business still being run in the name of Andrew Carnegie. And there was Mr. O'Brien behind the counter, with the anchor and dolphins inked on his hairy arm, considerably drunker than any lord Flemming had ever met.

"I want you to tell this gentleman the story of the stuff," said the man with the cocked eye.

O'Brien squared his elbows on the counter and repeated the tale as Flemming had first heard it from the ex-merchant.

"Why did you knock off work after hoisting one box?" asked Flemming.

"This was the way of it," answered Mike. "When me an' my mate first set eyes onto it, down there under the brown water, my mate he ups and lets a yell out of him in the name of gold. Then we makes one end of a rope fast to a tree an' in he goes with t'other end and makes that fast around the handiest o' them chests. He no more nor turns an' heads up than a shark makes a slant for him from seaward an' a brace o' alligators splashes into the water from the bank.

"Well, sir, two of them got a holt onto my mate, an' pretty soon all three of them was havin' a look in; an' there I was left alone, but with the rope an' the box. I recovers my spirits afore sundown and pulls in the rope. I knocked off the lid and there was the gold, all done up in little bags. Well, sir, I spent three more days right there, now a-countin' of my gold and now a-countin' the alligators an' sharks cruisin' around the remainin' nine chests. Then thirst took holt of me throttle and a terrible longin' to be somewheres else. 'The money'll keep,' says I, an' starts north along that coast.

"Here an' there I comes to an' encounters a city, or maybe only a town, but mostly well supplied with the stuff for brewin' the cup what cheers. I reaches the Gulf Coast in a course o' time—say seven months. My fortune dwindles now, bein' spread outrageous all along from that river-mouth where we was wrecked by the mercy of God—me an' my mate—to where I finds myself at last with no more nor two pocketsful o' the coin left. Then I goes aboard a little vessel and eventually reaches this here store. I sells away my birthright for a mess o' gin in bottles, rum in the wood, kegs an' boxes an' bags o' other shopkeepin' stuff."

"That's right," said Andrew. He turned to Flemming. "Sharks and alligators. Those are the trouble, as Mr. O'Brien's story suggests. What we need is a diving outfit."

"I'll just take a look at those nine chest lying on the mud before I invest," said Flemming. "And, if you have no objections, I'll glance over the papers connected with the sale and transfer of this business."

At a word from Andrew, O'Brien produced a packet of papers from a safe in the back of the store. Flemming read these and found them to be in accordance with all he had heard of the affair. He noticed that O'Brien had signed with his mark.

FLEMMING and the ex-merchant reached a port of Central America without accident. There they purchased a handy little boat and stocked it with water and provisions. Flemming paid

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the price, of course. Mr. Andrew Carnegie hadn't a cent. Andrew produced a compass and chart and the map which he had received from Mike O'Brien.

"See here," said Flemming, the moment he glanced at the map, "you told me that O'Brien had made this map himself."

"That's what he told me," returned Andrew.

"Then he's a liar," said Flemming. "He can't write, as you know. He can't even sign his own name. The chap who drew this map could write like a schoolmaster."

The man with the cocked eye looked displeased.

"What the —— does it matter?" he exclaimed. "We have the map, whoever made it—and the map don't lie, as I've proved. The boxes are there, just as the map says."

THEY reached Hell on the fifth day, and Flemming saw that it had been aptly named. It was on a flat, uninhabited coast. The mouth of the sluggish river was hidden by mangroves. Half a mile up the river lay the nine boxes, in four fathoms of brown water.

Next morning they set sail again, still heading southward. In the first town they reached they bought a diving outfit. Flemming cabled to his bank in Barbados for all available funds at his command. The money came, the deal went through and Flemming and his partner returned to Hell.

The flat coast, the sweating jungle and the sluggish river were unchanged and the nine chests lay all in order under four fathoms of brown water. It was close upon sundown when they went ashore and fixed things shipshape for the night. They rigged up a sort of tent with a spare sail from the boat. Fortunately, they had brought plenty of fly-netting with them, and grass hammocks. Their store of provisions was well selected and their medicine-chest contained plenty of quinine.

"We must stand guard, turn and turn about," said Andrew.

"What for?" asked Flemming. "What are we to guard against?"

"Wild beasts and such," returned the other. "The swamp is full of alligators."

"I haven't seen any, and I've kept a sharp look-out for them."

"—— you, mister, I'm skipper here!" cried the ex-merchant, turning furiously. "Understand that. What I say goes!"

For a second or two Flemming stared at his companion aghast. Then, being a gentleman of considerable spirit, pride and muscular development, he advanced swiftly, with the intention of administering a thrashing as plain as print in his eye. Andrew retreated a step and pulled two guns. He presented them with precision, indicating familiarity with weapons of the kind. This was the first that Flemming had seen of the revolvers, and there was something in this fact which fanned him to a white heat of rage. But he did not jump. He swallowed hard, breathing harshly.

"You miserable rascal, I'll make your hide curl for this!" he said.

For fully ten minutes they faced each other, motionless. The expression on the ex-merchant's swarthy face was diabolical. His nose seemed to swell and empurple under the other's glance. His cocked eye took on an even more painful slant to starboard than usual. But suddenly the features relaxed and subsided and the glare of the brown eyes dimmed. The fellow lowered the revolvers.

"Don't mind me," he said in a dazed voice. "The heat and desolation of this place have played the deuce with me. Sorry. What did I do? This is Hell, sure. I lived here all by myself for three weeks, and it wasn't good for my headpiece."

He sighed profoundly, brushed his hand across his eyes and turned away. Flemming's rage ebbed out like water.

"If you have a touch of the sun, then for heaven's sake keep those shooters in the tent," he said.

Andrew cooked the evening meal, talking steadily and with an effort at gaiety all the while, as if attempting to wipe away the impression of his recent violence from the other's mind. All of his talk was strained, however, and much of it was downright flighty; and its effect on Flemming was the birth of a feeling of intense apprehension and distrust. And as he talked he started constantly and glanced over his shoulder at the encompassing jungle. Flemming wondered but said nothing. He feared that his companion had suddenly gone crazy.

Carnegie stood the first watch; but Flemming did not sleep, though he pretended to. The man of mixed bloods sat in front of the tent, close to the fire, with those villain-

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ous revolvers in his lap. Flemming could see his head turning constantly this way and that. About midnight a long, desolate, high-pitched cry rang from the black mangroves. It sounded strangely human and piteous. Carnegie jumped to his feet, cowered back to the doorway of the tent and discharged both revolvers.

"What was that?" asked Flemming.

"One of those pesky jaguars," replied the other in a shaken voice.

The cry was not repeated. At two o'clock Flemming went on guard, armed with one of the pistols, and Carnegie retired beneath the sail and pretended to sleep. Daylight broke early and suddenly all along the eastern sky, painting that dismal jungle with heavenly colors. For an hour Flemming sat and gazed at the river, smoking and reflecting, but very observant. The ex-merchant was sleeping, or pretending to. No alligator showed himself on the squashy shores or in the golden water, and no black fin cruised up from the hidden sea.

"Somebody is lying," observed Flemming to himself.

IMMEDIATELY after an early breakfast they pulled the boat into mid-stream, anchored it there directly over the nine chests and got ready the diving apparatus and the windlass for hoisting the treasure. It had been agreed that Flemming was to do the diving, for he had no fear of the water and Carnegie's horror of that brown river seemed to be rooted in his very soul.

"It may be from what O'Brien told me about his mate and the alligators, or maybe from those days I sat on the muddy bank and gazed down at the boxes till they crawled under my eyes and the heat sweated out my very soul," he said. "Anyway, I can't go down. I'm sorry."

"I am sure O'Brien is a liar," said Flemming; but he went down into the brown water willingly enough and made a rope fast to the nearest box.

Carnegie hoisted it and swung it aboard. Flemming gave the signal and followed the third box to the surface.

"I'll smoke a cigarette," he said. "It's hot work down there."

Carnegie wiped the slime and mud from the boxes with restless hands. It had been agreed that no box was to be broken into until all nine were safely aboard the boat.

"But the air supply is all right, isn't it?" asked the ex-merchant. "We must keep at it, you know. We must clear this river before sundown."

"What's your hurry?" retorted Flemming. "They have lain there for years. What's your rush all of a sudden?"

"I feel as if something threatened," said the other, in a dry, unnatural voice. "Anything may happen, you know. One can never tell what may happen."

Flemming laughed, replaced his helmet and went down again. It was close upon noon when he tied the rope to the last of the chests of treasure. The moment it broke the surface he signaled to be drawn up himself.

He waited, staring through the thick, glass eye of his helmet at the brown world of shadows and slanted weeds, wondering whether there could have been any truth at all in the stories of sharks and alligators. Again he signaled. Suddenly he was aware of a difficulty in breathing. He jerked violently at the signal-cord. An ugly suspicion crossed his mind. The last chest was up and he was at the mercy of the man in the boat—a fellow of mixed blood and unsound mind. A monstrous fear gripped him. He pulled at the signal-cord until something broke and it came writhing down to him through the brown water. He pulled at the life-line, and it, too, came down to him. He fought blindly for breath; then, with a sudden glimmer of reason and hope, he tried to clear himself of his weighted boots. He beat upon his helmet with bleeding hands. The surging, muffled agonies of suffocation were his. The water against the glass eye turned from brown to crimson, from crimson to purple.

III

FLEMMING'S return to consciousness was twisted with pain, sickening, dizzy. He sprawled in the beating sunshine, weak as a new-born kitten, sick and suffering to the very core of his being. His tortured lungs labored in the hot air, and by the brown water that poured from him it was evident that he had somehow managed to break the glass front of the helmet. His face was cut.

At last he lay still and opened his eyes. He was aboard the boat, sprawled on the roof of the little cabin forward. The air-

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pump, the helmet and sections of the diving-suit were scattered around him. The thought came to him, heavily, that Carnegie had not intended to drown him after all, but had saved his life. He sat up, propped his head and shoulders against the mast and looked about for his partner.

He saw him; and he stared at him more in wonder than in horror. The ex-merchant lay in the waist of the boat, across the boxes that had been hoisted from the bed of the river. The swarthy, square face was turned to the wide glare of the sky, and across one temple and the forehead ran a crimson gash with a gruesome substratum of white bone. He was dead! As dead as the waterlogged oak of the chests across which he lay.

"It looks as if some one had killed him," remarked Flemming weakly.

"I done it," came in a high-pitched voice from close alongside.

A head and shoulders appeared above the port gunwale—a head of long, dripping, red hair and flaring whiskers. Such a face as showed between the growths of hair was as red as new brick. Two eyes, blue and bright as blue lightning, met Flemming's astonished regard. The stranger dragged himself into the boat, paused for a moment beside the body of the ex-merchant to leer down at the broken skull, then sprang nimbly up beside the sick man. He was tall, angular and thin as death.

"I seen what his game was, mister," he said, still in that curious, childish, high-pitched voice. "Oh, I ain't such a fool! I knowed he'd try for to leave ye down there with the weed an' the mud the very minute I clapped eyes onto ye. So I swims out whilst he's busy with the last box—an' you stranglin' down there—an' lets him have it with the old cutlass I've bin keepin' for him or Mike O'Brien. That's the how of it, mister; but ye ain't lookin' just right yet, so I'll give ye a tot o' rum an' water an' let ye rest for a while."

"Who are you?" inquired Flemming.

"John Plum by christenin', but knowed for common by the name o' Sunset," replied the other cheerily. "Mike O'Brien was my mate—an' 'twas me he hit over the nob when I come ashore from hitchin' onto that first box o' gold for him, an' left for dead half in an' half out o' the stinkin' water there. But take yer rum, mister."

Flemming swallowed the rum. His head and shoulders slid sidewise to the deck and to the sound of John Plum's high rendering of "A Sailor's Wife" he sank deep into the slumber of utter exhaustion. While he slept the red man swam ashore again, dismantled the tent and returned to the boat with the sail. This he rigged above the sleeper as an awning. He then emptied the dead man's pockets and slid him over the side into the brown water, singing all the while.

Flemming awoke an hour later, feeling greatly refreshed and almost himself again. The boat was in motion, drifting slowly seaward. John Plum was boiling coffee over a little charcoal stove and at the same time minding the helm. While they sipped the coffee and smoked, Plum told his story.

It seems that he and his friend Mike had been "on the beach" for several months before happening upon the place which the late Mr. Carnegie had so aptly named Hell. They had been hustled from town to town by the police. At last, quite at their wits' ends, they had come to that flat coast and sluggish river. They had found the bones of a man under the mangroves, a rusty cutlass and a map, all neatly drawn on sailcloth but smudged and sodden by the weather of many seasons. They had looked at the map and then discovered the treasure without difficulty.

John Plum had dived with a rope, made it fast to one of the chests and been clubbed over the head by O'Brien while scrambling ashore. He had lain as one dead for hours; and upon recovering had found an empty chest at the edge of the river and no sign of his mate.

"My head didn't feel just right—no, not for days an' days," he said. "I figgered on nothin' but waitin' for Mike to come back an' try to git them nine remainin' boxes. I knowed they was full o' gold, for didn't I pick up a couple o' quid he'd dropped? Well, mister, I waited an' I waited for the lord knows how long. After I'd et up the grub Mike left behind him—for he'd had to leave it so's to lug off the gold—I was often hungry. But I et fruit an' fish an such, an' waited.

"I knowed he'd come back some day for them other nine boxes, or send some one. Well, mister, sure enough that there cock-eyed son of a rum bottle come along, an' after he'd had one look at the boxes down in the river I scart him away so blasted

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suddent he left all his provisions behind him. An' I kep' on waitin'. That's the how of it, mister."

"And now what do you intend to do?" asked Flemming kindly.

"I figger on sailin' along with you, mister, to the handiest town, an' there I'll bank my share o' what's in them chests, buy a boat an' outfit an' come back here an' wait for Mike," said John Plum.

"You had far better come right along north with me," returned the other. "This river is no place for a sane man to live. You need a change, John, and if you waited here until the Last Trump you'd never see Mike O'Brien. He'll never come back. He's got a good business in St. Kitts."

John combed his red whiskers with his thin fingers.

"That bein' so, mister, I'll ship with ye," he said reflectively. "An' maybe ye'll tell me how you come to git mixed up with the feller with the cock-eye."

Flemming told his story. Then they set to work with the rusty cutlass and broke open the nine chests, one after another.

John Plum laughed long and loud.

"Ain't that the ——est!" he cried, half choked with mirth. "That's Mike's luck for ye—to git away with the box o' coin an' leave us the brass buttons, the knives an' the dinky little teaspoons!"

But Flemming did not see the joke.

"I've paid for the secret of Hell, sure enough," he said bitterly. "Carnegie took my last thousand. Lord, what a fool I am!"

Plum stopped laughing and fished a wad of banknotes from a pocket of his ragged trousers.

"I figger this here is yer money, mister," he said. "I took it off that feller I killed just before I hove him overboard."

IV

THE seeds of fever had entered Flemming's blood during his brief stay on the bank and in the depths of that sluggish river. It laid him on his back in a hot, dirty town on the coast, and for a month and five days John Plum doctored him, nursed him and guarded him.

"John, you have stood by me like a brother," said Flemming, when ready to continue the northward journey. "I mean to do what I can to make it up to you, John. Half of whatever I have is yours, and my friendship always and wholly."

John Plum pulled foolishly at his foolish beard.

"Don't worry about me, mister," he replied. "I took a likin' to ye first time I seen ye, an' that's all I can say. Glad to have done ye a sarvice. The sea is my callin', so don't ye worry. Ye think me cracked. I see it in yer eye. Well, cracked I be; but a smart sailor in spite of it. I can look out for myself, mister, thank 'e all the same."

"Why do you say you are cracked?" asked Flemming gently.

"——, mister, I can feel it in my poor head an' always have," replied the other cheerfully. "But I'll stay with ye an' look after ye till we get back to yer friends," he added.

Flemming let the subject drop there, but he was determined, secretly, to repay the poor fellow's services with the care of a lifetime.

In Barbados John Plum vanished. Flemming hunted high and low for him, but without finding even the slightest trace. Finally, the edges of the harbor were very carefully dragged and a body, sadly mutilated by the crabs, was found.

PAUL FLEMMING went home, crippled in pocket, mourning the loss of poor John Plum and thoroughly sick of the romance of adventure. Three years passed before the old spirit was aflame in him once more. He returned to the West Indies, his eyes all eager again to translate the vile and the commonplace into the fine and the unusual. He went ashore in St. Kitts. He went up to the store that had once been the property of that rascal who had lured him to what had almost proved his undoing. The old sign still hung above the narrow doorway. He smiled bitterly.

"I learned the secret of Hell," he reflected, "and we all paid for it—all of us but Mike O'Brien."

He entered the store, sniffing those racy scents of rum, new rope, sugar, spices and ship's goods which lift such places from the commonplace of trade to the brisk realms of golden adventure. A very stout man leaned to him across a counter. This was not O'Brien. The trader's beard was red and neatly trimmed. The trader's eyes

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were bright and blue, like blue lightning. Flemming sat down weakly on a coil of rope.

"Mister, I'm glad to see ye," said the merchant heartily, but in a high, childish voice. "I've bin intendin' to write ye every day, but every day I've had my business to attend to. My old mate, Mike O'Brien, left me the business, ye see. It's a fine business."

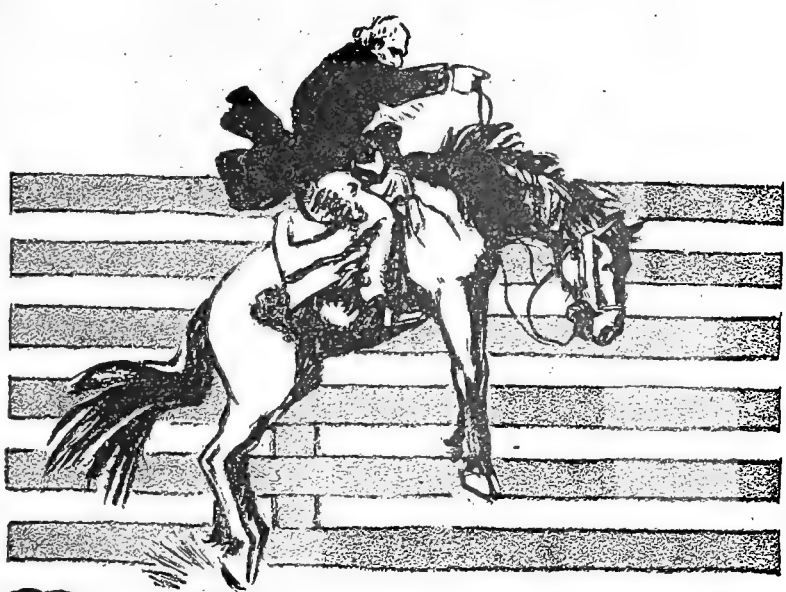
His eyes glittered around the shadowy store. His big hands opened and closed on the edge of the counter.

"A fine business. I grow fat on it," he added. "Aye, fat on my old mate's good business!"

"And where is O'Brien?" gasped Flemming.

"The devil who spawned him only knows," replied John Plum. And then, slowly and harshly, "I'll ask ye never to say his name to me again, mister. It burns in my head. Aye, the name of him, and the face of him, burns in my poor head!"

He glanced furtively all around the shadowy store.



The Conversion of Red Neck

By Hiram Moe Greene

"BUCK" KEEFER bent over the earthen vessel that stood in the shade against old man Blackwell's adobe and dipped in with a battered porcelain cup. Buck was a newcomer who had ridden in from the Quioxtoa country to get his mail. Blackwell watched him. Blackwell was an exception to the rule; Blackwell asked questions.

"You uster be over Dog Canyon way, didn't you?" he asked.

The steady, parching, alkali-laden wind of the Arizona desert had dried his throat, and Buck dipped into the jar again, at the same time sneaking a look out of the corner of his eyes at Blackwell. After drinking slowly, Buck pulled the sacking across the wide mouth of the jar, put back the board

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that covered the sacking and set the cup in the exact center of the board. Then Buck smiled.

"Lord, yes, I been there," he laughed as he took a vacant place on the bench that, running along the wall, was screened from the sun by the rough wooden porch-roof. It was the usual weekly assembly, Blackwell and his brother and so forth. "It ain't the most beautifullest spot in New Mexicer. I have seen other dismembered slices of tarey farmer that looked better and some what looked worse. New Mexicer ain't no continuous garden spot, but outside of a ticket office, Arizony ain't got no international reputation fer meadows and boundin' brooks."

"You oughter stayed there if you liked it so well," Blackwell suggested. "Did they run you out?"

"Well, I dunno. I had a misunderstandin' with a idea."

"A idea! Why, they can't do no harm. Them's on your mind," Blackwell commented emphatically.

"It depends," said Buck easily, "how you get them—whether the idea comes to you out of the air into your head or whether they comes to you with pants on. Some of mine come to me with pants on and others just floated into my head."

Buck told his story as follows:

SLIM HENDERSON—I was workin' for Slim, cooking for the "H" outfit—Slim fetched his father from Center Ossipee, or Ossified, or some other mortarfyin' place in New Hampshire, to make him happy by spendin' his shortenin' days in the cow country down below Deming. The days is long wherever Slim is, and they both figgered it would be pretty nice. It seemed to them like a good idea.

The two of 'em rode in slowly toward the ranch one evenin' with that there old, gray-haired, interlecturin' lookin' dad all dressed up in his funeral clothes, with a kind o' gray hurrah-fer-Blaine plug hat on, the ends of his pants workin' up toward his knees as he rode aside of his son. It was kind of good to look at, especially if you didn't have no father, er no son, er no black pants.

But Slim had a wrong idea. He done the wrongest thing a honest, dutiful and respective son could have did to the man what give him a chance to grow up into a human critter. They's no excusin' Slim. He knows his pa was a ejudcated, well-read feller what had never been off the New Hampshire range and had been fetched up on garden truck, fish and traditions. The square thing for Slim to have done was to interduce the old gent to all hands and then sit down beside him in the deepo until a train come along what would have took the old man straight back to Center Osprey—or whatsomever the name is of that there bull's-eye town.

He might even have said to him in a even tenor voice: "Father, this here is the most onery country in the whole onery world." He wouldn't need to have swore, but he could of made it as strong as the American langwige. He could of said: "This here is a country fer rattlesnakes, canned goods, liquor and a easy-goin' lot of erresponsible ruffians who has fergot the past and ain't thinkin' nothin' of the future," and things like that. He could of said: "It ain't no place fer an ejudcated man. Edjucation has about as much chance in this here land of the freak as a tallow egg has of burnin' a hole in a parafeen fryin'-pan. They's no problems to work out that can't be done without orations er hired by the month. It's no place fer readers and thinkers. It's the place of riders and drinkers." He could of said: "I love you jest the same, dad, as I did in them childhood days when you uster make me live a upright life with a barrel-stave. I love you, hope to die! I do, but fer God's sake, go back to Center Orsfeed"—or whatsomever the name of the place was er is.

But, no, he had to lope the old man down to the ranch. He told him jest to go ahead and make himself as happy as he could, which Slim's pa tried to do in his best ejudcated way. But he got plumb lonesome. He got tired o' drinkin' the glories of nature, feedin' the hens and watchin' the sunsets. When a feller is fetched up as he told about, in a feather bed and town meetin's and Carnegie libraries on every hand, they's times when he sort of yearns, as they say, fer mittens, a knit scarf around his neck, and cold feet. Why, he was that lonesome I know he would of give eight dollars fer a couple o' first-class New Hampshire chilblains. And fer an icicle as long as yer arm—they's no tellin' what he wouldn't of done fer that. At last he got so bad he took to readin'.

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I noticed it first and speaks to Slim about it. But he didn't give me no satisfaction. He said it was the old man's idea of bein' happy. I told Slim it warn't my idea, and I was sure no man could read as much as he did and be altogether at home in his garret. He knowed enough anyway, and they warn't no use of his learnin' more, as old as he was. He couldn't of used none of it. I ast Slim if he had any idea of what it might be in them books the old man had sent fer.

"Buck, you don't understand men like my dad," he says to me. "You let him enjoy hisself."

"Enjoy hisself!" says I. "Why he ain't enjoyin' hisself, diggone yer old skin! He's gettin' more and more ejudcation, gettin' new thoughts, new idears about soup-or-nacharal things. He told me so hisself."

But Slim wouldn't listen. He said it was none of my business what the old gent done, and to keep still about it. And so I did, till one day the old man was readin' and I said to him, friendly, what was he readin' about? I can't recite his own words; they was all about a new idea; but I catched on to the drift of it. What do you suppose it was! The dangest thing I ever heard. I couldn't get the whole shebang straight. But the way he talked, and the way he looked was so sort of cold-shivers-like that fer the first time in my misprint life I wished they was some one else around. An' you can't blame me.

But I told him in a gentle and polite way that as fer as I was concerned it didn't matter much to me one way or the other, and, I says, ef it was anything to him, I'd give in right at the start and we'd say no more about it. I wanted to have the whole thing over and done with.

But he said I was *spec*tacle or *skep*tacle or somethin' like that. And when I told him ef I was anythin' I hadn't orter be, to not hold it ag'in' me, he up and said he would prove it.

Well, I am jest as kind-hearted and agreeable as a monkey in a cage. I didn't want nothin' proved. It wasn't nothin' to me what I was. I didn't give a dang. But I says to him that ef he would leave off readin' books beginnin' with p-s-y-c-h, I would let him do it. He said he had experimented some without nobody knowin' it, and he was convinced that the action o' the human mind on the human mind, which everybody knew about, could be carried farther, and that the human mind could influence and direct the thoughts o' the lower animals, chickens, cows, horses and sech kind.

It was all right fer him to call a chicken a lower animal—a hen ain't no inseck—but when it come to callin' a horse a lower animal, well, it ain't no use to argue with folks what has read somethin' in a book.

So he says fer me not to mention it to Slim under any consideration, but to prepare fer the next day at two and he'd show me somethin'. And he did.

WE SETS down facin' each other. After a while, in a deep voice, he says:

"You know that brown hen with the black tail-feathers? Well, you and me by concentratin' our minds are goin' to make her lay. All you do is to think the same as I do, and think *hard* she will lay, and she will!"

He said some other things, but I couldn't quite catch on. We wasn't to speak or move, jest think the hen was goin' to lay an egg. He said he had done it all alone fer more'n a week and it had never failed yet.

It seemed like a durn fool thing to do; but he was such a fine old man, fer away from home and all that, and I didn't want him to think I was spectacle, so I sat still, him watchin' me. When I did try to turn away, I hope to die if I could! I was magnated to him and I couldn't get away. I thought of every durn thing in my whole life. Why, it was as still—so measly, itchin' quiet—that I wanted to jest jump up and yell and git out from under. Everything seemed to be pressin' against me. I couldn't take a long breath. It was the most still stillness I ever heard.

We must of sat there thirty minutes before I got down to thinkin' steady about that there hen with the black tail-feathers. I would think of her and then I'd try my best to forget her. I counted up to three hundred and sixty-eight to keep my mind off of her, but I hope to die ef I could. It was no use tryin'. Well, just when I felt myself lettin' go, I says to myself, "All right then, I'll think of the dang hen, and dang me if I don't think she'll lay!"

What do you suppose breaks that there awful stillness but a cackle. The old man motioned. I follered him out. He didn't

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say a word. It was the brown hen cacklin', all right. Mr. Henderson he headed fer the nest, with me trailin' him. He put the egg in my hand and it was warm yet.

Well, you should of seen that old man smile. I remember his words as he took the egg outer my hand.

"This is a very wonderful thing," says he. "A *very* wonderful thing. I alone have been able to make her lay an egg—*one* egg! But see," he says, pointin' to the egg, "what two minds can do. That is a double-yolked egg!"

You could see on the outside that it was a two-yolker, fer it had that lump around it. We went into the house again and he cracked it in a saucer, and them was two of the nicest yolks smilin' up at me as I ever see. The whole idea dumfounded me. It was a regular hen miracle. I couldn't say nothin' but look at the old man and then at them yolks.

After a while, the old man says, "Are you convinced, Mr. Keefer?"

And when I says I was beyond all shivers and a doubt, he says that they was a greater experiment to try; and now as I displayed sightkick powers, it was my duty as a noofight to go on with my prentership. Of course I didn't know what he meant, but I tells him that ef I was any different from what I was before we started the two-yolked business, that it was his fault; and, anyway, as Slim hired me as I was, he wouldn't like me to be any different. But when a man argifies in words what is forren to yer nature they's only one answer to give back, and that is yes or no. I knowed the old man would get me to come his way at some time or another, so I says "yes." Then he told me what he was goin' to do.

Slim had went up to El Paso fer somethin', and the old man magnated me into ropin' a bronco we called "Red Neck" and puttin' the four-legged devil in a stall. It was a onery, usefulless, no-account critter that nobody wanted. It had trailed a outfit up from Lordsburg and quit 'em at Slim's ranch. Nature had intended it fer a sorrel, I guess, but it and nature didn't agree no way, so it was ashamed, I guess, and turned sort o' red. It could eat more'n a hippopotanoose and they was more meat on a grasshopper's shinbone than there was on that dang horse.

I started in to give the old man my idea of that thin-slatted critter, but the old man says, repeatin' from a book, somethin' like this:

> "They's so much bad in the worst of us,
> And it's so much worse in the best of us,
> That it behooves most of us to forget
> The good what gets the best of us.

"Nothin' is bad," says he. "We're all doin' the best we can with what we have to do with and in accordion with our lights."

And maybe he said "liver." Anyway, he went out there with a p-s-y-c-h book and started in to read a section or a quarter section to that dang, dumb, hollow brute. And he kept it up a little every day fer a week, when Slim comes back.

I follered Slim out behind the corral and I takes him by the hand and says to him, "Slim, they's somethin' on my mind I wants to mention to you."

"Well," he says, "ef yer goin' to bring up the question of the old man's happiness, why you might jest as well quit before you start. His ideas are different from yours. You don't understand him, that's all. He's happy and he's takin' a great likin' to you. I'm going' to raise yer pay to forty per, beginnin' nex' month. Say no more about it."

And he walks away and left me standin' there.

They's always somethin' happens when I get a raise. I don't like it. It's a evil omen. So when Slim walks away, I goes in an' ties my other shirt in a neat bundle.

THE nex' day Slim starts for Alamogordo, and I'm left there in primevil solitude with that there old man from Center Ostrich and them p-s-y-c-h books.

No sooner had Slim gone than the old man goes out to eddyfy that critter. Once I went along, jest to see, and, hope to die ef that there onery animal wouldn't quit eatin', hang its durn head and listen while the old man sat there on a overturned water pail readin' the riot act to that dang horse in the most gentle voice and quietin' langwige what I ever heard away from a legal execution or a church. Them words got into me too, and I was gittin' so diggone moderate in my talk, and so dang quiet in my ways that I felt ef I didn't run away, I'd turn parson, bank cashier or undertaker, or somethin' where you speak low. I couldn't cuss no more. I'd always "dadburn" or "diggone" instead. I was chang-

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in' faster'n I could get acquainted with myself.

The old man says on the fourth day, "I want you to bring Red Neck out in the corral and put a saddle on him. I'm goin' to take a little ride."

"Not on your everlastic life!" says I. "It's murder, suicide, arson, arsault and battery and carryin' concealed weapons. Why, Mr. Henderson," says I, "Slim'll miss you so much!"

"I'll be here when he comes back," says he. "That poor, unlearned, unenlightened animal now sees the error of his ways. He realizes he's been slothful, unappreciatively, and it's time fer his spiritchul regeneration."

"Nobody can ride the dang brute in peace, comfort or the territory of New Mexico," says I. "And even ef what you say is so about what it is time fer to happen, the horse is Slim's and it'd be much better fer him to see whatever it is what is goin' to happen."

But there was nothin' to say or be did but to do as he says. So I follers the old man out. He preached to the dang critter fer a minute, and then I let him into the corral where I had left the gate open so as the horse could make a bee-line fer Bowie with no stops at the intervenin' flag stations. But what did that dang, mean, onprincipled critter do but stand still and let me rope him and put the bridle on and cinch up that there saddle with no more trouble than ef I was harnessin' a equestrian statute!

Then Mr. Henderson says he'd get on. I told him that I thought the experiment had gone fer enough fer the first day—that we orter save some of it by rights. But he wouldn't listen to me, though I ast him not to, and done my best to explain that nobody what had any relatives or friends or place o' habitation had any business to monkey with that there mean, low-down, contemplous animal. But on he would go, and on he went.

I have seen unveilin' of figures, fellers walkin' high wires in a circus, and once I seen a ship with all her sails flung out, but I never seen nothin' so full of inspiration and prespiration than that of Slim's dad sittin' up straight as a deep-water Baptist and holdin' them there reins. So fer, he had carmed that unruly beast.

He pulls upon the reins—mind you, I had not taken the rope off the horse's neck, and they cantered around that there corral as purty as you please, and fetched up where we had started. It was a horse miracle.

"Take off the rope," says the old man.

"Not till you get off," says I.

"Haven't yer faith?" says he. "Do not spoil this experiment by quivelin'."

I told him I didn't even know how to quivel. And while we was talkin', that dang critter begins to paw and hop around in a circle. Fer about three minutes she pulled me around that there corral at the end of a rope with the old man repeatin' chapters of them books to her as fast as he could let them out.

When she kind o' haltered down, the old man quits his peaceful speech and he yells at me,

"Dad burn ye, Keefer, throw off that line!" I warn't goin' to, but he says, "Diggone ye, ye take that there line off right away or I'll have ye——"

He never got no ferther'n that, fer that dang animal jumped up in the air an' comes on down on four feet with a terrible jolt. But the old man was so plumb full o' faith that he held on like as though it was the New Testament. She kicked up behind and then went and stood up on her hind legs with me holdin' on the rope, and the old man dad-burnin' my picture and incitin' me to let go that there rope.

But I had no more intention o' lettin' go that there rope than a cow has o' steerin' a ship. It was altogether far and away contrary to the nachul laws in sech case made er provided. Well, while I was meditatin' in silent roomination as I was bein' drugged around the corral, whether to shoot the dang horse or get behind the critter, tangle her in the rope and let her throw herself, she swung around quick, like a barn door in a wind, and give me both her hind legs in my stummick, right in the pit.

Fer a while things was dark. Durin' them oncertain moments I must o' let loose o' the rope, fer when I begun to see agin, the old man and that dang Red Neck was goin' around that corral, buckin' and jumpin' worse'n a trained horse in a show. Mr. Henderson was holdin' to the saddle in front by the pommel, and the other hand hooked on behind, but he was goin' back and forth and wigglin' around like he was a injy rubber man with a hollow backbone.

I rolls over on my stummick, 'case I was so sick I couldn't got up no other way,

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and jest when I got on my hands and knees they shot out of the corral like a oiled shadder. I crep' over to the gate, sufferin' most excrooshootatin' pains in the stummick, and the most conscience stickin' feller as ever in hull of New Mexico. I know I was the penitentietest man outside o' the penitentiary, and I knew Slim would wallop the internal lights out o' me ef anythin' happened to his dad.

I LAYS there on my stummick and watches that there recedin' cloud o' dust of old man Henderson and Red Neck until it wasn't no bigger'n a flea's eye. Then I rolls over on my back and I says to myself:

"Buck, yer a backslider, and the consarndest fool agoin'. Yer a liar and a horse thief, an' a no-count human, two-legged thing. Yer ain't got no more faith'n a janitor of a church. Diggone yer old stummick, get up! Don't lay here like a sick cat. Yer ain't no brighter'n a blind man with twins!"

Then I sort o' gets holt of myself, rubs my stummick and my head, sayin': "I got faith now, and that dang old Red Neck can't hurt sech a good man as old Mr. Henderson. Ef he could he would, and ef he did he has; but whatever it is, I got my faith back."

It warn't no easy job fer me to git on a horse. I was sick! But with one hand on my stummick, and my mind concreted on that there central thought that I had to do it, I fetched out another horse and went out o' that there corral down the road to Deming. I heard the five-thirty-two whistlin' when I was about six miles out, and afore I got to town I seen Slim comin' up drivin' a waggin with two ponies trailin' on behind.

When I got up to him I didn't say nothin', ner he to me. I jest rides by and turns around and seen the old man stretched out on some hay. He hadn't lost nothin' but his self-respec', his watch, his collar-buttons, a part o' his faith and some o' his clothes. He shook his head fer me not to tell.

There warn't nothin' said. Slim never even stopped the team. He jest run his hands down in his pockets, skinned off thirty-five dollars in bills, my month's pay, and holds them out to me. When I got them I rode on ahead to get my other shirt what I had tied up in that neat bundle.

BUCK leisurely looked up the road where in the distance a tiny, copper-colored cloud against the green of the desert marked the coming of the mail.

"The old man went back to Center Orseflee—or whatsomenever the name is of that diggone place he come from," said Buck. "I been thinkin' maybe he might send me a postal card, tellin' me he was happy again."

Buck lifted the board off the big *olla* and reached for the cup.

"Bein' happy," he said, "hain't no new idea like playin' a pianny and cuttin' yer own hair; it's a nachul thing, like ropin' a steer an' smokin' cigarettes. Ef it 'tain't in you, you can't get it out of you."

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The Soul of a Regiment by Talbot Mundy

SO LONG as its colors remain, and there is one man left to carry them, a regiment can never die; they can recruit it again around that one man, and the regiment will continue on its road to future glory with the same old traditions behind it and the same atmosphere surrounding it that made brave men of its forbears. So although the colors are not exactly the soul of the regiment, they are the concrete embodiment of it, and are even more sacred than the person of a reigning sovereign.

The First Egyptian Foot had colors—and has them still, thanks to Billy Grogram; so the First Egyptian Foot is still a regiment. It was the very first of all the regiments raised in Egypt, and the colors were lovely crimson things on a brand new polished pole, cased in the regulation jacket of black waterproof and housed with all pomp and ceremony in the mess-room at the barracks.

There were people who said that it was bad policy to present colors to a native regiment; that they were nothing more than a symbol of a decadent and waning monarchism in any case, and that the respect which would be due them might lead dangerously near to fetish-worship. As a matter of cold fact, though, the raw recruits of the regiment failed utterly to understand them, and it was part of Billy Grogram's business to instil in them a wholesome respect for the sacred symbol of regimental honor.

He was Sergeant-Instructor William Stanford Grogram, V. C., D. S. M., to give him his full name and title, late a sergeant-major of the True and Tried, time expired, and retired from service on a pension. His pension would have been enough for him to live on, for he was unmarried, his habits were exemplary, and his wants were few; but an elder brother of his had been a ne'er-do-well, and Grogram, who was of the type that will die rather than let any one of his depend on charity, left the army with a sister-in-law and a small tribe of children dependent on him. Work, of course, was the only thing for it, and he applied promptly for the only kind of work that he knew how to do.

The British are always making new regiments out of native material in some part of the world; they come cheaper than white troops, and, with a sprinkling of white troops in among them, they do wonderfully good service in time of war—thanks to the sergeant-instructors. The officers get the credit for it, but it is ex-non-commissioned officers of the Line who do the work, as Grogram was destined to discover. They sent him out to instruct the First Egyptian Foot, and it turned out to be the toughest proposition that any one lonely, determined, homesick fighting-man ever ran up against.

He was not looking for a life of idleness and ease, so the discomfort of his new quarters did not trouble him over-much, though they would have disgusted another man at the very beginning. They gave him a little, whitewashed, mud-walled hut, with two bare rooms in it, and a lovely view on three sides of aching desert sand; on the fourth was a blind wall.

It was as hot inside as a baker's oven, but it had the one great advantage of being easily kept clean, and Grogram, whose fetish was cleanliness, bore that in mind, and forbore to grumble at the absence of a sergeants' mess and the various creature comforts that his position had entitled him to for years.

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What did disgust him, though, was the unfairness of saddling the task that lay in front of him on the shoulders of one lone man; his officers made it quite clear that they had no intention of helping him in the least; from the Colonel downward they were ashamed of the regiment, and they expected Grogram to work it into something like shape before they even began to take an interest in it.

The Colonel went even further than that; he put in an appearance at Orderly Room every morning and once a week attended a parade out on the desert where nobody could see the awful evolutions of his raw command, but he actually threw cold water on Grogram's efforts at enthusiasm.

"You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," he told him a few mornings after Grogram joined, "or well-drilled soldiers out of Gyppies. Heaven only knows what the Home Government means by trying to raise a regiment out here; at the very best we'll be only teaching the enemy to fight us! But you'll find they won't learn. However, until the Government finds out what a ghastly mistake's being made, there's nothing for it but to obey orders and drill Gyppies. Go ahead, Grogram; I give you a free hand. Try anything you like on them, but don't ask me to believe there'll be any result from it. Candidly I don't."

BUT Grogram happened to be a different type of man from his new Colonel. After a conversation such as that, he could have let things go hang had he chosen to, drawing his pay, doing his six hours' work a day along the line of least resistance, and blaming the inevitable consequences on the Colonel. But to him a duty was something to be done; an impossibility was something to set his clean-shaven, stubborn jaw at and overcome; and a regiment was a regiment, to be kneaded and pummelled and damned and coaxed and drilled, till it began to look as the True and Tried used to look in the days when he was sergeant-major.

So he twisted his little brown mustache and drew himself up to the full height of his five feet eight inches, spread his well-knit shoulders, straightened his ramrod of a back and got busy on the job, while his Colonel and the other officers did the social rounds in Cairo and cursed their luck.

The material that Grogram had to work with were *fellaheen*—good, honest coal-black negroes, giants in stature, the embodiment of good-humored incompetence, children of the soil weaned on raw-hide whips under the blight of Turkish misrule and Arab cruelty. They had no idea that they were even men till Grogram taught them; and he had to learn Arabic first before he could teach them even that.

They began by fearing him, as their ancestors had feared every new breed of task-master for centuries; gradually they learned to look for instant and amazing justice at his hands, and from then on they respected him. He caned them instead of getting them fined by the Colonel or punished with pack-drill for failing at things they did not understand; they were thoroughly accustomed to the lash, and his light swagger-cane laid on their huge shoulders was a joke that served merely to point his argument and fix his lessons in their memories; they would not have understood the Colonel's wrath had he known that the men of his regiment were being beaten by a non-commissioned officer.

They began to love him when he harked back to the days when he was a recruit himself, and remembered the steps of a double-shuffle that he had learned in the barrack-room; when he danced a buck and wing dance for them they recognized him as a man and a brother, and from that time on, instead of giving him all the trouble they could and laughing at his lectures when his back was turned, they genuinely tried to please him.

So he studied out more steps, and danced his way into their hearts, growing daily stricter on parade, daily more exacting of pipe-clay and punctuality, and slowly, but surely as the march of time, molding them into something like a regiment.

Even he could not teach them to shoot, though he sweated over them on the dazzling range until the sun dried every drop of sweat out of him. And for a long time he could not even teach them to march; they would keep step for a hundred yards or so, and then lapse into the listless shrinking stride that was the birth-right of centuries.

He pestered the Colonel for a band of sorts until the Colonel told him angrily to go to blazes; then he wrote home and purchased six fifes with his own money, bought a native drum in the bazaar, and started a band on his own account.

Had he been able to read music himself

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he would have been no better off, because of course the *fellaheen* he had to teach could not have read it either, though possibly he might have slightly increased the number of tunes in their repertory.

As it was, he knew only two tunes himself—"The Campbells Are Coming," and the National Anthem.

He picked the six most intelligent men he could find and whistled those two tunes to them until his lips were dry and his cheeks ached and his very soul revolted at the sound of them. But the six men picked them up; and, of course, any negro in the world can beat a drum. One golden morning before the sun had heated up the desert air the regiment marched past in really good formation, all in step, and tramping to the tune of "God Save the Queen."

The Colonel nearly had a fit, but the regiment tramped on and the band played them back to barracks with a swing and rhythm that was new not only to the First Egyptian Foot; it was new to Egypt! The tune was half a tone flat maybe, and the drum was a sheepskin business bought in the bazaar, but a new regiment marched behind it. And behind the regiment—two paces right flank, as the regulations specify—marched a sergeant-instructor with a new light in his eyes—the gray eyes that had looked out so wearily from beneath the shaggy eyebrows, and that shone now with the pride of a deed well done.

OF COURSE the Colonel was still scornful. But Billy Grogram, who had handled men when the Colonel was cutting his teeth at Sandhurst, and who knew men from the bottom up, knew that the mob of unambitious countrymen, who had grinned at him in uncomfortable silence when he first arrived, was beginning to forget its mobdom. He, who spent his hard-earned leisure talking to them and answering their childish questions in hard-won Arabic, knew that they were slowly grasping the theory of the thing—that a soul was forming in the regiment—an indefinable, unexplainable, but obvious, change, perhaps not unlike the change from infancy to manhood.

And Billy Grogram, who above all was a man of clean ideals, began to feel content. He still described them in his letters home as "blooming mummies made of Nile mud, roasted black for their sins, and good for nothing but the ash-heap." He still damned them on parade, whipped them when the Colonel wasn't looking, and worked at them until he was much too tired to sleep; but he began to love them. And to a big, black, grimming man of them they loved him.

To encourage that wondrous band of his, he set them to playing their two tunes on guest nights outside the officers' mess; and the officers endured it until the Colonel returned from furlough. He sent for Grogram and offered to pay him back all he had spent on instruments, provided the band should keep away in future.

Grogram refused the money and took the hint, inventing weird and hitherto unheard-of reasons why it should be unrighteous for the band to play outside the mess, and preaching respect for officers in spite of it. Like all great men he knew when he had made a mistake, and how to minimize it.

His hardest task was teaching the Gyppies what their colors meant. The men were Mohammedans; they believed in Allah; they had been taught from the time when they were old enough to speak that idols and the outward symbols of religion are the sign of heresy; and Grogram's lectures, delivered in stammering and uncertain Arabic, seemed to them like the ground-plan of a new religion. But Grogram stuck to it. He made opportunities for saluting the colors—took them down each morning and uncased them, and treated them with an ostentatious respect that would have been laughed at among his own people.

When his day's work was done and he was too tired to dance for them, he would tell them long tales, done into halting Arabic, of how regiments had died rallying round their colors; of a brand new paradise, invented by himself and suitable to all religions, where soldiers went who honored their colors as they ought to do; of the honor that befell a man who died fighting for them, and of the ten-fold honor of the man whose privilege it was to carry them into action. And in the end, although they did not understand him, they respected the colors because he told them to.

II

WHEN England hovered on the brink of indecision and sent her greatest general to hold Khartum with only a handful of native troops to help him, the First Egyptian Foot refused to

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leave their gaudy crimson rag behind them. They marched with colors flying down to the steamer that was to take them on the first long stage of their journey up the Nile, and there were six fifes and a drum in front of them that told whoever cared to listen that "The Campbells were coming—hurrah! hurrah!"

They marched with the measured tramp of a real regiment; they carried their chins high; their tarbooshes were cocked at a knowing angle and they swung from the hips like grown men. At the head of the regiment rode a Colonel whom the regiment scarcely knew, and beside it marched a dozen officers in like predicament; but behind it, his sword strapped to his side and his little swagger-cane tucked under his left arm-pit, inconspicuous, smiling and content, marched Sergeant-Instructor Grogram, whom the regiment knew and loved, and who had made and knew the regiment.

The whole civilized world knows—and England knows to her enduring shame—what befell General Gordon and his handful of men when they reached Khartum. Gordon surely guessed what was in store for him even before he started, his subordinates may have done so, and the native soldiers knew. But Sergeant-Instructor Grogram neither knew nor cared.

He looked no further than his duty, which was to nurse the big black babies of his regiment and to keep them good tempered, grinning and efficient; he did that as no other living man could have done it, and kept on doing it until the bitter end.

And his task can have been no sinecure. The Mahdi—the ruthless terror of the Upper Nile who ruled by systematized and savage cruelty and lived by plunder—was as much a bogy to peaceful Egypt as Napoleon used to be in Europe, and with far more reason. Mothers frightened their children into prompt obedience by the mere mention of his name, and the coal-black natives of the Nile-mouth country are never more than grown-up children.

It must have been as easy to take that regiment to Khartum as to take a horse into a burning building, but when they reached there not a man was missing; they marched in with colors flying and their six-fife band playing, and behind them—two paces right flank rear—marched Billy Grogram, his little swagger-cane under his left arm-pit, neat, respectful and very wide awake.

For a little while Cairo kept in touch with them, and then communications ceased. Nobody ever learned all the details of the tragedy that followed; there was a curtain drawn—of mystery and silence such as has always veiled the heart of darkest Africa.

Lord Wolseley took his expedition up the Nile, whipped the Dervishes at El Teb and Tel-el-Kebir, and reached Khartum, to learn of Gordon's death, but not the details of it. Then he came back again; and the Mahdi followed him, closing up the route behind him, wiping all trace of civilization off the map and placing what he imagined was an insuperable barrier between him and the British—a thousand miles of plundered, ravished, depopulated wilderness.

So a clerk in a musty office drew a line below the record of the First Egyptian Foot; widows were duly notified; a pension or two was granted; and the regiment that Billy Grogram had worked so hard to build was relegated to the past, like Billy Grogram.

Rumors had come back along with Wolseley's men that Grogram had gone down fighting with his regiment; there was a story that the band had been taken alive and turned over to the Mahdi's private service, and one prisoner, taken near Khartum, swore that he had seen Grogram speared as he lay wounded before the Residency. There was a battalion of the True and Tried with Wolseley, and the men used methods that may have been not strictly ethical in seeking tidings of their old sergeant-major; but even they could get no further details; he had gone down fighting with his regiment, and that was all about him.

THEN men forgot him. The long steady preparation soon began for the new campaign that was to wipe the Mahdi off the map, restore peace to Upper Egypt, regain Khartum and incidentally avenge Gordon. Regiments were slowly drafted out from home as barracks could be built for them; new regiments of native troops were raised and drilled by ex-sergeants of the Line who never heard of Grogram; new men took charge; and the Sirdar superintended everything and laid his reputation brick by brick, of bricks which he made himself, and men were too busy under

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him to think of anything except the work in hand.

But rumors kept coming in, as they always do in Egypt, filtering in from nowhere over the illimitable desert, borne by stray camel-drivers, carried by Dervish spies, tossed from tongue to tongue through the fish-market, and carried up back stairs to Clubs and Department Offices. There were tales of a drummer and three men who played the fife and a wonderful mad *feringhee* who danced as no man surely ever danced before. The tales varied, but there were always four musicians and a *feringhee*.

When one Dervish spy was caught and questioned he swore by the beard of the prophet that he had seen the men himself. He was told promptly that he was a liar; how came it that a *feringhee*—a pork-fed, infidel Englishman—should be allowed to live anywhere where the Mahdi's long arm reached?

"Whom God hath touched——" the Dervish quoted; and men remembered that madness is the surest passport throughout the whole of Northern Africa. But nobody connected Grogram with the *feringhee* who danced.

But another man was captured who told a similar tale; and then a Greek trader, turned Mohammedan to save his skin, who had made good his escape from the Mahdi's camp. He swore to having seen this man as he put in one evening at a Nile-bank village in a native *dhow*. He was dressed in an ancient khaki tunic and a loin-cloth; he was bare-legged, shoeless, and his hair was long over his shoulders and plastered thick with mud. No, he did not look in the least like a British soldier, though he danced as soldiers sometimes did beside the camp-fires.

Three natives who were with him played fifes while the *feringhee* danced, and one man beat a drum. Yes, the tunes were English tunes, though very badly played; he had heard them before, and recognized them. No, he could not hum them; he knew no music. Why had he not spoken to the man who danced? He had not dared. The man appeared to be a prisoner and so were the natives with him; the man had danced that evening until he could dance no longer, and then the Dervishes had beaten him with a *koorbash* for encouragement: the musicians had tried to interfere, and they had all been beaten and left lying there for dead. He was not certain, but he was almost certain they were dead before he came away.

Then, more than three years after Gordon died, there came another rumor, this time from closer at hand—somewhere in the neutral desert zone that lay between the Dervish outpost and the part of Lower Egypt that England held. This time the dancer was reported to be dying, but the musicians were still with him. They got the name of the dancer this time; it was reported to be Goglam, and though that was not at all a bad native guess for Grogram, nobody apparently noted the coincidence.

Men were too busy with their work; the rumor was only one of a thousand that filtered across the desert every month, and nobody remembered the non-commissioned officer who had left for Khartum with the First Egyptian Foot; they could have recalled the names of all the officers almost without an effort, but not Grogram's.

III

EGYPT was busy with the hum of building—empire-building under a man who knew his job. Almost the only game the Sirdar countenanced was polo, and that only because it kept officers and civilians fit. He gave them all the polo, though, that they wanted, and men grew keen on it, spent money on it, and, needless to say, grew extraordinary proficient.

And with proficiency of course came competition—matches between regiments for the regimental cup, and finally the biggest event of the Cairo season, the match between the Civil Service and the Army of Occupation, or, as it was more usually termed, "The Army vs. The Rest." That was the one society event that the Sirdar made a point of presiding over in person.

He attended it in *mufti* always, but sat in the seat of honor, just outside the touch-line, half way down the field; and behind him, held back by ropes, clustered the whole of Cairene society, on foot, on horseback and in dog-carts, buggys, gigs and every kind of carriage imaginable. Opposite, and at either end, the garrison lined up—all the British and native troops rammed in together; and the native population crowded in between them wherever they could find standing-room.

It was the one event of the year for which all Egypt, Christian and Mohammedan, took

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a holiday. Regimental bands were there to play before the game and between the *chukkers*, and nothing was left undone that would in any way tend to make the event spectacular.

Two games had been played since the cup had been first presented by the Khedive, and honors lay even—one match for the Army and one for the Civil Service. So on the third anniversary feeling ran fairly high. It ran higher still when half time was called and honors still lay even at one goal all; to judge by the excitement of the crowd, a stranger might have guessed that polo was the most important thing in Egypt. The players rode off the pavilion for the half-time interval, and the infantry band that came out on to the field was hard put to it to drown the noise of conversation and laughter and argument. At that minute there was surely nothing in the world to talk about but polo.

But suddenly the band stopped playing, as suddenly as though the music were a concrete thing and had been severed with an ax. The Sirdar turned his head suddenly and gazed at one corner of the field, and the noise of talking ceased—not so suddenly as the music had done, for not everybody could see what was happening at first—but dying down gradually and fading away to nothing as the amazing thing came into view.

It was a detachment of five men—a drummer and three fifes, and one other man who marched behind them—though he scarcely resembled a man. He marched, though, like a British soldier.

He was ragged—they all were—dirty and unkempt. He seemed very nearly starved, for his bare legs were thinner than a mummy's; round his loins was a native loin-cloth, and his hair was plastered down with mud like a religious fanatic's. His only other garment was a tattered khaki tunic that might once have been a soldier's, and he wore no shoes or sandals of any kind.

He marched, though, with a straight back and his chin up, and anybody who was half observant might have noticed that he was marching two paces right flank rear; it is probable, though, that in the general amazement, nobody did notice it.

As the five debouched upon the polo ground, four of them abreast and one behind, the four men raised their arms, the man behind issued a sharp command, the right-hand man thumped his drum, and a wail proceeded from the fifes. They swung into a regimental quickstep now, and the wail grew louder, rising and falling fitfully and distinctly keeping time with the drum.

Then the tune grew recognizable. The crowd listened now in awe-struck silence. The five approaching figures were grotesque enough to raise a laugh and the tune was grotesquer, and more pitiable still; but there was something electric in the atmosphere that told of tragedy, and not even the natives made a sound as the five marched straight across the field to where the Sirdar sat beneath the Egyptian flag.

Louder and louder grew the tune as the fifes warmed up to it; louder thumped the drum. It was flat, and notes were missing here and there. False notes appeared at unexpected intervals, but the tune was unmistakable. "The Campbells are coming! Hurrah! Hurrah!" wailed the three fifes, and the five men marched to it as no undrilled natives ever did.

"HALT!" ordered the man behind when the strange cortège had reached the Sirdar; and his "Halt!" rang out in good clean military English.

"Front!" he ordered, and they "fronted" like a regiment. "Right Dress!" They were in line already, but they went through the formality of shuffling their feet. "Eyes Front!" The five men faced the Sirdar, and no one breathed. "General salute—pre-sent arms!"

They had no arms. The band stood still at attention. The fifth man—he of the bare legs and plastered hair—whipped his right hand to his forehead in the regulation military salute—held it there for the regulation six seconds, swaying as he did so and tottering from the knees, then whipped it to his side again, and stood at rigid attention. He seemed able to stand better that way, for his knees left off shaking.

"Who are you?" asked the Sirdar then.

"The First Egyptian Foot, sir."

The crowd behind was leaning forward, listening; those that had been near enough to hear that gasped. The Sirdar's face changed suddenly to the look of cold indifference behind which a certain type of Englishman hides his emotion.

Then came the time-honored question, prompt as the ax of a guillotine—inevitable as Fate itself:

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"Where are your colors?"

The fifth man—he who had issued the commands—fumbled with his tunic. The buttons were missing, and the front of it was fastened up with string; his fingers seemed to have grown feeble; he plucked at it, but it would not come undone.

"Where are——"

The answer to that question should be like an echo, and nobody should need to ask it twice. But the string burst suddenly, and the first time of asking sufficed. The ragged, unkempt, long-haired mummy undid his tunic and pulled it open;

"Here, sir!" he answered.

The colors, blood-soaked, torn—unrecognizable almost—were round his body! As the ragged tunic fell apart, the colors fell with it; Grogram caught them, and stood facing the Sirdar with them in his hand. His bare chest was scarred with half-healed wounds and criss-crossed with the marks of floggings, and his skin seemed to be drawn tight as a mummy's across his ribs. He was a living skeleton!

The Sirdar sprang to his feet and raised his hat; for the colors of a regiment are second, in holiness, to the Symbols of the Church. The watching, listening crowd followed suit; there was a sudden rustling as a sea of hats and helmets rose and descended. The band of four, that had stood in stolid silence while all this was happening, realized that the moment was auspicious to play their other tune.

They had only one other, and they had played "The Campbells are coming" across the polo field; so up went the fifes, "Bang!" went the drum, and, "God Save Our Gracious Queen" wailed the three in concert, while strong men hid their faces and women sobbed.

Grogram whipped his hand up to the answering salute, faced the crowd in front of him for six palpitating seconds, and fell dead at the Sirdar's feet.

AND so they buried him; his shroud was the flag that had flown above the Sirdar at that ever-memorable match, and his soul went into the regiment.

They began recruiting it again next day round the blood-soaked colors he had carried with him, and the First Egyptian Foot did famously at the Atbara and Omdurman. They buried him in a hollow square formed by massed brigades, European and native regiments alternating, and saw him on his way with twenty-one parting volleys, instead of the regulation five. His tombstone is a monolith of rough-hewn granite, tucked away in a quiet corner of the European graveyard at Cairo—quiet and inconspicuous as Grogram always was—but the truth is graven on it in letters two inches deep:

HERE LIES A MAN

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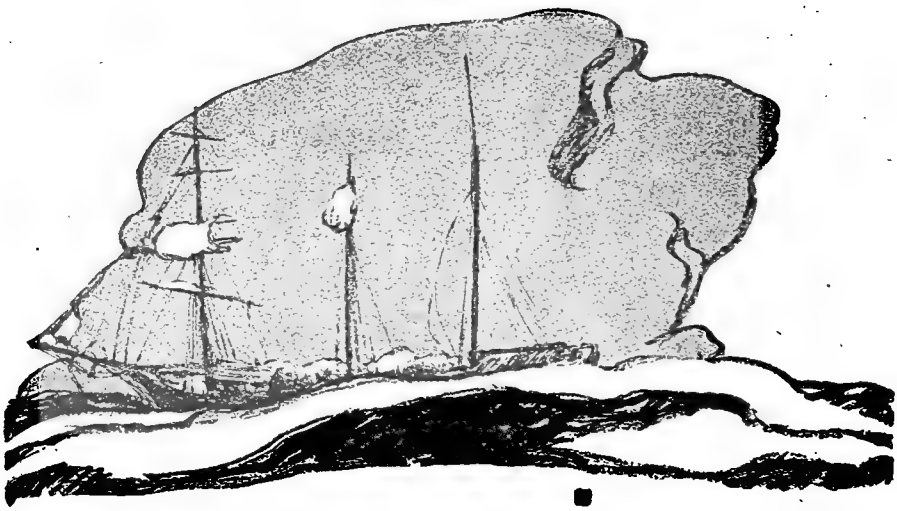

Wrecks of the New Jersey Coast

By Percy Mc·Cushing

IN THE department of the Life-Saving Service at Washington they sometimes speak of "a night's work on the Jersey Coast," which, to a casual listener, carries no especial significance. It is only when one is curious enough to probe behind the matter-of-fact attitude of the department officials, or dig into the time-yellowed reports of the Coast Patrol, that one obtains a glimmer of what this branch of Government Service expects of its servants, and of the unemotional heroism that is concealed in that casual phrase—"a night's work."

From Washington, if you go down into the life-saving stations along the Jersey shore, you will find the same casual indifference to the story of one night which is now history—an indifference that might lead to the belief that the occasion was a trifle, were it not for the fact that in the memories of the old men of the Service its details are still vivid.

It was the third of February, 1880. Two storms were rushing along the Atlantic coast. They met off the Jersey shore, a howling, roaring conflict of wind and weather, snow-rent and sleet-riven. New inlets were formed in the beaches that night. Sand hills were inundated. The meadow lands from Jersey City to Long Branch were flooded. The sea was tremendous. At times the gale reached a velocity of eighty-four miles.

As darkness settled, the life-saving crews in the stations along the wind-swept coast watched the sea with foreboding in their hearts. At midnight the storm was at its height.

In the next twelve hours during its continuance, the apprehensions of the Jersey patrol found realization. Within those twelve hours there were five wrecks within the scope of four consecutive stations, while another disaster engaged a station a short distance beyond. The men of the stations rescued forty-three persons, toiled hungry and half-frozen in darkness and tempest, established a standard of bravery and fortitude that is unique, and went through the ordeal with that offhand carelessness of personal risk which characterizes those of their calling.

A DOUBLE RESCUE

AT ONE in the morning, Keeper Charles H. Valentine of Station Number 4 lay gravely ill of pleurisy. At one-thirty, surfman Van Brunt, staggering into the drift of the gale on the west patrol, caught the red gleam of a light in the breakers. So

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fierce was the wind, filled with driven sand and sleet, that he could not look into its teeth, but by shielding his eyes and looking across it, he saw the outline of a large schooner. She was the *E. C. Babcock* of Somer's Point, and she was on the bar close to shore.

Van Brunt ran for the station and gave the alarm. Despite his illness, Keeper Valentine rose from his bed and in person led his crew to the rescue. Baffled by the snow which lay thick along the beach, by the gale that tore seams in their faces, and by the intense cold which froze shot-line and beach apparatus, the life-savers fought for two hours to get a line aboard the stranded vessel. At length they succeeded, and a man came ashore in the breeches-buoy. He said that the Captain of the *Babcock* had his wife and two small children on board. The breeches-buoy was sent out again, and the Captain came ashore in it, his six-year-old daughter in his arms. His wife followed. Then came the mate with the other child. Last came the rest of the crew.

The life-savers went back to the station, and in the early hours of the stormy dawn were hastily rearranging the apparatus when one of the men saw a large brig coming head on for the shore. Keeper Valentine had gone back to bed, but once more he arose and insisted on leading his men again to the scene of danger.

Before the crew could get the half-prepared beach apparatus to the surf, the brig, running furiously before the tremendous sea, her sails split and tattered, struck with terrific impact. The tide was very high, and the brig, the *Augustina* from Havana, came up close to the station and well inside the breakers. Just before she struck, the life-savers could see a man at the wheel, apparently steering composedly, his face emotionless, a pipe in his teeth.

When the shock came, a torrent of frothing seas broke over the vessel's stern, covering the helmsman; but a moment later he could be seen standing at the wheel, unmoved. Then the brig swung broadside to the fusillade of thundering surf, and her crew fled forward to the bitts.

By this time the life-savers were on the beach with their gun, while a crowd of some hundreds of persons watched from the shelter of the higher dunes. The brig was so close to shore that surfman Garrett White, following a receding sea down the beach, succeeded in throwing a heaving stick and line on board her.

This the crew secured, and hauled the whip-line on board, but, getting the tail-block, did not know what to do next. In vain the life-savers signalled and shouted to them. They were Spanish, and the directions on the billet attached to the lines were in Italian and English only.

At this moment the life-savers were filled with horror. The crew of the grounded brig, unable to solve the mystery of rigging the breeches-buoy, were preparing to take a terrible risk. One of them seized the line and started the attempt of coming in on it hand over hand.

MEANTIME the wreck of the *Babcock*, a quarter of a mile up the beach, had broken up, and the fragments of the vessel, together with her cargo of cordwood, were being swept by the current down about the *Augustina*, filling the surf with tumbling débris which well-nigh insured the death of any one who fell into it. In a moment the whip-line, over which the sailors were preparing to come in, fouled in the wreckage. Disregarding the shouts to wait, the first sailor, clad only in a pair of trousers, seized the line and began working his way in on it hand over hand.

A few feet below him the surf and driftwood boiled and thundered. Suddenly a giant comber rushed upon him, caught him in its grip and hurled him over the line. With the desperation of despair he hung on, but, as he came down, the two parts of the line, crossing as it turned, caught him by the neck in the bight, and as the sea receded he was left suspended in mid air, slowly strangling, while he clutched wildly at the tight-drawn rope.

At each roll of the vessel offshore, the line was drawn tight as a banjo string, and in a moment the ill-fated sailor would have had his head severed, had not the iron nerve of surfman White interfered.

Rushing waist deep into the breakers, White seized the man, and as the brig rolled inshore and the line slackened, he slipped the bight from the sailor's neck.

The next second both were caught in the inrush of wood and water and torn from the line to be hurled beneath the breakers. By a terrific effort White succeeded in regaining his footing and, still clutching the sailor, dragged him out of the surf.

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While this struggle was taking place, two more sailors had started down the line from the brig. Surfman Van Brunt sprang into the water to aid them, but was swept from his feet, his life hanging on a straw in the deadly mass of tumbling timbers. He was carried down-shore a hundred yards where a friendly wave shouldered him up on the beach. At the moment Van Brunt's peril was recognized by those on shore, surfman Potter leaped to his assistance, only to be himself unfooted and flung on to a floating mass of drift. As he lay there struggling to get to his feet, the line suddenly tautened in the current and falling across his breast held him pinioned under water. For fully a minute he lay there helpless in sight of his comrades and slowly drowning. At last, nearly dead, a wave washed him free.

Meantime, one of the two sailors was torn from his hold on the rope and washed ashore unconscious. Surfman Ferguson went for the other and brought him in. Surfman Lockwood rescued the fourth man.

And so, one by one, in grim hand-to-hand combat with the storm, the crew of the wrecked brig were rescued. Hours later she was boarded in the surfboat. In the cabin, lying in his bunk, a pistol bullet through his head, they found the Captain. He had been part owner of the vessel, and when he had seen that she was lost, he had gone below, scrawled a note in Spanish saying he was ruined, and shot himself.

THREE MORE OF THE SAME NIGHT'S WRECKS

WHILE the men of Station Number 4 were battling at these two wrecks, those of Station Number 2 were rescuing seven men and the Captain's wife from the three-masted schooner *Stephen Harding*. While five miles off-shore the *Harding* had been in collision with the schooner *Kate Newman*, which had gone down with all hands, save one man, who, as the vessels came together, leaped over the bulwarks of the *Newman* on to the deck of the *Harding*.

As the Captain of the latter craft afterward described it:

"We were laboring in the gale when, suddenly, out of the darkness came another ship. She stood on the top of a monstrous wave, high above us, and when this wave went down, she came down on us with it, and was stove to kindling-wood. The next minute she was gone in the night, leaving behind her only the single man who fell on our decks as she struck us."

The *Harding* was disabled by the collision, and went ashore soon afterward. Surfman Wilson went out in the breeches-buoy and superintended the landing of all on board, coming ashore last himself.

Meanwhile, the life-savers of Station Number 3 were landing the crew of the brig *Castalia;* those of Station Number 5 were struggling in the storm at the wreck of the schooner *Light Boat.*

THE REMARKABLE RESCUE OF THE "GEORGE TAULANE"

AT THE same time Stations Numbers 11 and 12 were waging one of the grimmest and gamest fights against masterful odds in the history of the Service.

This struggle was at the wreck of the schooner *George Taulane.* The night before the big storm she was off Navesink, running steadily in the growing wind. An hour found the snow shutting thick over the rim of the sea, and the gale increased to a hurricane. It was two in the morning when the craft found herself in distress. At that hour, the deck load of lumber, piled high, broke loose. The terrific roll of the schooner in the high sea sent huge timbers tumbling about her decks, making it almost impossible for the crew to stay above hatches. Twenty minutes later, fire was discovered on board. Flames shot aft from the forecastle, igniting the deck load. It looked for a time as if the crew would have to abandon the craft and take to the open boats, but at length they succeeded in putting out the fire.

Meantime the course of the vessel was lost. It was eight o'clock in the morning when breakers were sighted and it was discovered that the *Taulane* was sagging toward them. A desperate effort to claw her off the lee shore failed, and, as a last resort, the Captain let go both anchors. This move was responsible for the six grim hours of battling which followed among the two life-saving crews on shore.

The anchors failed to hold. For an instant they brought the head of the vessel into the wind, but as they dragged she soon paid off, rolling helplessly in the trough, the seas combing her deck and sending the crew flying aloft for their lives.

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With her progress somewhat arrested toward shore by the dragging anchors, the *Taulane* began drifting parallel to the shore, getting in close to it very slowly. At this time she was discovered by the life-savers of Station Number 11.

This crew, leaving beach apparatus behind and knowing that no life-boat could live in the breakers, followed the craft as she drifted along the coast, calculating that she would ground near Station Number 12 and depending on that station for apparatus. Shortly afterward the wreck was seen by Keeper Chadwick, of Station 12, who ordered out his crew with beach-cart and gun.

At this time, the vessel was about halfway between the two stations. On one side the crew of Station 11 were following her along the beach; on the other the crew of Number 12 were coming to meet her.

As said before, the sea was running terribly high, and in addition to this and the sleet-riven gale the tide was exceptionally full. It covered the beach with a foaming flood that never receded before another incoming rush of water took its place. Between the beach hills, along the tops of which it was necessary for the approaching life-saving crews to travel, deep sluices formed, through which the water rushed as the surf pounded in and receded with gripping swiftness, carrying the footing of sand with it as the undertow swept out.

In these sluices, tumbling furiously, were huge masses of driftwood, old spars and the shattered parts of ships, that imperilled the lives of whoever came near them.

Through such perils, with the inrush and refluence of water clutching their legs, tearing them from their feet and hurling them struggling into the dangerous jumble of wreckage and drift, the crews of the two stations fought on to meet each other, the men of Number 12 dragging the heavy beach-cart and cannon, those of Number 11, though traveling lighter, having almost as hard a time of it.

OUTSHORE of them, the old ocean tumbled in across the bar, a never-ceasing sweep of foam. Inshore, behind the hills, the dismal marsh and sand barrens lay half flooded. Often the men of both crews waded in the freezing water to their waists. All were drenched, with their frozen clothing crackling stiffly on their bodies like tin. But they hung desperately to their task.

It was between nine and ten o'clock when the two crews met. The horses that had started with the beach-cart of the men from Station 12 had refused to ford the sluices between the hills and had been left behind, the men dragging the cart themselves. The helpless *Taulane* was then still holding off the bar by her dragging anchors, and still drifting along shore. The two life-saving crews now joined forces in a strange and terrible battle.

The vessel was four hundred yards offshore, her men in her rigging, the seas breaking and tumbling white all over her hull. But she was still moving, steadily, surely, alongshore, her keel free of the sand.

The life-savers at once placed the surf-gun and a line which was fired fell across the *Taulane* out of reach of her shipwrecked crew. Before another could be fired the vessel had drifted southward out of range.

Loading the gun and apparatus into the beach-cart, the two life-saving crews started after her alongshore, laboring manfully in the sand and flooded sluices to keep pace with the drift of the vessel to leeward. In order to do this they were obliged to proceed at what was almost a run. After twenty minutes of breathless work, they were again opposite her, the gun was once more planted, and another shot fired.

At this portion of the beach, the sand dunes were low, and the only point of vantage from which the gun could be shot was the top of the knolls. The knoll on which the effort was made was in an indentation in the shore, making it farther from the vessel, and, the line being wet and heavy, it failed to reach the *Taulane*.

Once more the crews of Stations 11 and 12 loaded the heavy beach-cart and staggered on after the fast drifting schooner. As the chase led to the south, the conditions on the beach became worse. The surf washed in higher, the sluices became more numerous, and the dry sand-dune tops farther separated.

The next dry hill was four hundred yards farther on, and the beach that lay before it was well-nigh impassable. After twenty minutes of grim effort it was finally gained only to find that the vessel had passed it and was drifting on.

Another march brought the men abreast of her, half-frozen and greatly weakened by

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exposure and cold, but the gun was placed and careful observations were taken to make this shot successful. That it would have been is probable had not the line parted. In the meantime six volunteers had joined the life-savers, making the rescue party a total of nineteen.

It is difficult to get an idea of the discouraging outlook that now faced the nervy men of the Service. Once more, grimly, they packed their cart and resumed the chase. Through the sleet they could see the schooner half-buried in the sea, with the dark forms of her seven miserable sailors lashed in the rigging. One of them was hanging downward, held by the lashings around his feet where they had slipped when he froze to death and fell.

PERHAPS the best account of the remainder of the terrible march to its ultimate end is given in the report of the Service of 1880, which says of it:

"From first to last, the difficulties of the life-savers and the perils which beset them never slackened a moment. The wheels of the cart, in coast phrase, 'sanded down' so rapidly—that is, sank so quickly in the infiltrated soil—that the conveyance had to be constantly kept on the move lest it should be lost. Often the cart had to be partially unloaded and portions of the apparatus carried by the crews to lighten it sufficiently to make progress possible, and at other times the men would have to fling themselves upon the wheels and hold them with all their strength to prevent the cart from being capsized by the inequalities of the submerged ground, or the overwhelming inburst of the sea rushing high over the axles. All the time, moreover, the ocean fury had been gradually tearing off and smashing the upper works of the vessel's hull and scattering off the pieces, together with her deck load of cord-wood, as she drifted along. This steadily continued, and the surf was full of this débris, which was constantly hurled up over the sand-hills right in the path of the advancing life-savers.

"The sluices, with their constant ebbs and flows, were full of splinters of wreck and cord-wood billets; and in fording the men's attention was about equally divided between steadying and hauling through the cart-load of apparatus, and avoiding the onset of these drifting projectiles. On the less inundated ground the danger continued, the wreck stuff assuming here partly the character of missiles, a sudden overburst of the sea, half carrying on the water, half flinging through the air, great sticks of wood upon the crew. Several of the men were knocked down by these flying pieces. Four months afterward Keeper Chadwick's right arm was still lame from one of the blows.

"The escapes were numerous. It was with great difficulty that the men could keep their feet in this constant onslaught and pelting of drift-wood. But not a man fell away or flinched from the work before him. The volunteers, like the crews, bore the racking labor with the same indomitable courage and composure, and the same disciplined obedience to the direction of the leader, every mind bent upon the rescue. The care and patience observed by the men in their operations were no less remarkable than their noble hardihood.

"Not the least difficult of their tasks was that of keeping the lines, and especially the guns and powder, dry in the universal drench around them, and it is difficult to understand how they contrived it; for, aside from the number of actual firings, wherever a momentary pause of the vessel as she grazed bottom, or a slowing of her motion, offered an opportunity for action, at least a dozen times, and probably more, the cart was hurriedly unloaded on the nearest eminence, the gun planted and the shot-line arranged for the effort, when the wreck would suddenly roll away upon her course, and the men would have to reload the cart and toil on again after her. In this way and with these interruptions, they worked down along the beach to station Number 12 and a quarter of a mile beyond it, when a chance offered for another shot; but the line parted. The crew again moved stubbornly on. It was now noon, and suddenly the man so long seen hanging in the rigging fell into the sea and was gone. The crew still followed the vessel with unslackened activity. Half an hour later they saw another man drop lifeless from the ratlines.

"LABORING forward now for the rescue of the remaining five, they suffered a misfortune. In staggering and floundering through one of the worst sluiceways with the cart, the gun toppled off into the flood and was lost. A desperate search was made at once, and finally it was found in four or five feet of water, fished up

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and wiped dry, and carried thenceforth by the stout Keeper on his shoulder. A man was dispatched back to Number 12 for a dry shot-line, while the crew, moved on to a point three-quarters of a mile below the station, where they got another chance to fire a shot, which, however, fell short, the tide having forced the firing party farther and farther back on the hills as they advanced, and the line, too, being weighted with moisture.

"The cart was again reloaded, and the march resumed. A mile below the station the man overtook them with the dry shot-line and, chance offering, the last shot was fired. This time it was a success! The line flew between the foremast and the jib-stay, and, the cut sweeping the bight of the line in to the side of the vessel, the sailors got hold of it and fastened it to the fore- and main-rigging.

"As the schooner still continued to drift and roll, nothing could yet be done, but while the greater part of the force loaded up the cart and trudged on with it, three or four kept fast hold of the shore end of the shot-line, and kept pace with the wreck in leash. At the end of another quarter of a mile the vessel suddenly struck the tide setting north, stopped, swung head offshore and worked back to her anchors under the comb of the breakers. The time had come at last; and the whip-line, with its appurtenances, was bent on to the shot-line, hauled aboard, and made fast by the tail of the block to the mainmast head.

"The wreck now slued around broadside to the sea and rolled frightfully. The hawser followed the whip-line on board, and the breeches-buoy was rigged on, but the vessel rolled so that it was impossible to set the hawser up on shore in the usual manner, so it was rove through the bull's-eye in the sand-anchor, while several men held on to the end to give and take with each roll of the vessel. The work of hauling the sailors from the wreck was now begun with electric energy. After two men were landed, the vessel took the ground, but the circumstances increased rather than diminished her rolling, and some conception of this powerful motion may be derived from the fact that in one instance the breeches-buoy with a man in it swung in the off-shore roll fully fifty feet in the air.

"The strain and friction upon the hawser were so great that the lignum-vitæ bull's-eye through which it ran at the sand-anchor, despite the hardness of the wood, was worn fully half an inch deep during thirty minutes of use. Within those thirty minutes, however, the five men were safely landed, the last man getting out of the buoy at half-past two."

And so closes the story of that which in the Department at Washington, is spoken of casually as "A night's work on the Jersey Coast."

THE TRAGIC EPISODE OF THE BARK "KRALJEVICA"

BARNEGAT SHOALS, off the New Jersey shore, have long been identified as a port of missing ships. Many a good craft has gone to pieces in their treacherous length, and the Life-Saving Service holds chronicles of fierce battles by its servants to succor the shipwrecked from vessels which have found final resting places upon them.

On the morning of February 11, 1886, the bark *Kraljevica* went ashore on the shoals under full canvas in a strong gale. Believing she was about to break up, her crew of fourteen men put off in a life-boat, drifted down coast five miles and were finally capsized in the breakers, eight of them being drowned, the others reaching the beach alive, finding a deserted fisherman's hut, and dropping exhausted in it.

Meantime the life-savers of the Barnegat Station, at daybreak, discovered the stranded bark a mile off-shore. Keeper Joel H. Ridgway was in charge of the station. He telephoned for help to the next station, Loveladies Island, and then as it was low tide he and his crew put off for the bark, not knowing, of course, that her crew had deserted her.

The life-boat, a new one of particularly staunch build, left the shore at quarter of six. In her, besides the Keeper, were surfmen Henry Reeves, Samuel F. Perrine, John I. Soper, Solomon Soper, Cornelius Thompson and William C. Inman. These men were all experienced in the Service and excellent boatmen. The place where the launch was made is sheltered by the southeast reach of the shoals, and the boat got away without trouble. It was when the first line of inrolling breakers was reached that Keeper Ridgway found that his estimate of the fierceness of the surf had been in error. From the outer sea giant combers boiled in

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across the bar, mountain high. The life-boat pitched like a chip in a seaway, standing first on one end and then on the other, threatening to turn over backward as the monstrous ridges of the breakers shouldered under her bow, shooting down the troughs so steeply that the stern rowers were thrown from the thwarts on to those that were pulling forward.

Tenaciously, with the hardihood that the Service breeds in its men, the crew stood to their oars, and inch by inch worked the life-boat out through the successive lines of breakers to within fifty yards of the stranded bark. It was then seen that she was deserted.

Keeper Ridgway would have been glad to send his boat up under the lee of the bark and give his crew a rest before starting them on the dangerous trip back to shore, but this was impossible. Worn out from their exertions, the men were unable to pull the boat farther to windward in the terrific sea. There was nothing left but to get her stern to sea and run for the beach.

An attempt was made to do this, but a sea nearly rolled the boat broadside, so Ridgway decided to back in, the rowers holding on their oars and keeping the boat head to sea. This was a slow and difficult task. Half an hour passed and but a hundred yards had been made. Then the keeper, seeing the strength of his crew ebbing, consulted his stroke oar, John Soper, and decided to try running before the sea again.

By this time the boat was half full of water, making her unwieldy and keeping one man bailing all the time, thus taking an oar out of her. Watching his chance, Keeper Ridgway shot the boat around with the steering oar and, dodging the first inrush of breakers, gained one hundred and fifty yards shoreward before the next inrush of waves caught them. This was also weathered, and half the distance to shore was covered in safety.

BUT the peril was only about to begin. Before the hardy life-savers now lay a sweep of water in which the breakers were continuous. There was but one thing to do, hold the boat against each inrush and trust to the current and wind to carry the craft to shore. For a moment the scheme worked. Then, suddenly, close astern—too close to permit the bow of the half-swamped craft to rise to it,—a huge wave mounted and crashed tons of water on the boat and her rowers, whirling her broadside to the sea and sending her tumbling over and over in the maelstrom of foaming peril like a log in a rapids.

The crew were thrown out, and then began a terrible struggle for life.

One of the men was probably killed as the boat overturned. This was Perrine. His body was found later a mile to the southward, an ugly blue bruise across the forehead, perhaps the work of the oak gunwale or the blade of an oar.

The other men at first tried to regain the boat, but seeing her turning over and over in the breakers, abandoned the effort and struck out for shore. Thirty minutes later Ridgway and Thompson were dragged out on the beach half-dead. Reeves was once within ten yards of shore, but the strong undertow carried him out again, and for twenty minutes more the Loveladies Island crew, which had meantime arrived, watched him fighting a desperate fight for life a hundred yards beyond their reach. He finally gained the shore a mile south of the place of the disaster.

Inman was the next to come ashore, half a mile farther along than Reeves. It took two hours to revive him. The others followed, but they were dead. They had fought to the last and died fighting.

Solomon Soper was the first to die after Perrine. He was an elderly man with a brave record in the Service. It may have been ten minutes after the capsize of the boat, that, weakened by his effort at the oars, his strength gave out and he sank.

John Soper made a gallant struggle for life, while the crowds on shore watched him. He was an exceptionally powerful swimmer. Buoyed by his cork jacket, he came toward the shore with strong certain strokes until he was almost within reach of those who dashed in to seize him, when suddenly he was caught by an eddy and swept far out again.

Once more he came on toward shore, only to be again caught and swept out several hundred yards. This time as he swam in those on shore noticed that the strength was leaving his strokes. He got within forty yards of the beach and remained there in plain sight, fighting the last grim and losing struggle. Gradually his efforts grew more feeble, until after a long time those on shore saw his head sink forward on his

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breast. The breaker that carried him ashore an instant afterward was just too late. He had not drowned; he had died of exhaustion.

It was five hours later before the sailors of the wrecked bark emerged from the hut down the beach, ignorant of the tragedy enacted while they slept. They were found by the life-savers and cared for.

Each of the three surfmen left a widow, and John Soper left two children. The third was born after his death.

THE WRECK OF THE "FANNIE A. BAILEY"

A WRECK attended by tragic details, one in which the life-savers unavoidably played a belated part, took place on Hereford Shoals, two miles off the Hereford Inlet Station, coast of New Jersey, on the night of June 3, 1883.

Fortunately this disaster occurred in warm weather, else it is probable that none of the crew of the schooner *Fannie A. Bailey* would have been saved. The vessel went aground in a heavy sea shortly before daylight and showed signs of breaking up. A heavy fog hid the distant shore, and as the schooner had lost her bearings in the gale, it was believed that she was far out at sea and had run on an uncharted reef.

This dubious prospect so alarmed the crew and the mate that they lowered the vessel's yawl, threw what they could reach into her, and prepared to leave the *Bailey* in the height of the storm. The Captain, who had with him his wife and three-year-old child, ordered the men to stand by the vessel, believing that help might come before she went to pieces, but so terrified were the crew that they paid no heed to him.

Tumbling into the yawl, with the mate at their head, they prepared to cast off despite commands, threats and, at last, entreaties from their Skipper, who with his wife and child and the only American sailor on board, remained on the deck.

At this moment, shame of the act seemed finally to reach the manhood of the mate, and he climbed once more on the schooner to induce the Skipper to follow him into the yawl. Seeing that if he refused he would be left with no possible means of escape in case of need, the Skipper yielded and passed his wife and child down into the yawl which pitched in the darkness under the schooner's quarter.

As the Captain was about to follow, the fog lifted, revealing a line of beach with a life-saving station on it not far distant. Along this beach a white stretch of tremendous breakers rolled, and all at once saw that it would be impossible for the small yawl to pass through them. Again the Captain commanded the men back on board, and realizing the sagacity of his order they were about to obey, when suddenly the yawl capsized, throwing all in her including the Skipper's wife and child into the water.

Lying across the main hatch of the schooner was a tiny nine-foot punt, unfit for anything but the smoothest water, but the Captain did not hesitate. He shot her overside into the terrific seaway and leaped into her. In some miraculous fashion the tiny cockleshell remained right side up, and the Captain pulled desperately to where the wife and child were struggling feebly. First the child was drawn on board, then the mother, and with the gunwale of the punt awash, the heroic man set out for the ship.

How he managed to keep the shell of a boat afloat in the storm-swept sea is a miracle, but he did it, and after a terrible effort came close enough to the schooner to catch a line thrown him by the mate and three of the sailors who had caught the anchor chains when the yawl capsized and climbed on board.

It was the work of a moment for the Captain to bend the line around the body of his now unconscious wife.

But as the weight of her body was hauled out of the boat the tiny craft, so suddenly lightened, was engulfed in a huge sea that sent her spinning into the darkness with the child still in her. Neither boat nor baby was ever seen again. The Captain, himself in the last stages of exhaustion, caught another line thrown to him and was hauled to safety.

Several hours later the wreck was discovered from the station on shore, and though the season was closed for the regular crew, a volunteer crew was picked up which reached the vessel and took off all hands in safety.

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A Thumb-Point Massacre

By Barton Wood Currie

RUFE PEBBLES reached out his huge bony fist, seized his father-in-law by his short chin whiskers and gave them a violent yank. Shriveled little Mr. Blossom uttered a sharp ejaculation of pain and by a desperate effort snatched his chin-flickers free and dodged behind the table.

"Take off them galluses o' mine, you ol' snappin' turtle!" commanded the vast-shouldered young farmer shrilly. "You'll be wearin' o' my clothes next an' gittin' lost into 'em. I'll give you a minute to take off them galluses or I'll larrup the hide offen you!"

Old Gerald Blossom hastily removed the galluses and tossed them across the table.

"What 'm I a-goin' to hold up these here pants onto?" he protested faintly. "You give the on'y galluses I had to Ole Jensen, the hired man, 'fore he broke out an' went off on a rip."

"Pin 'em up or belt 'em up," snapped back the truculent Rufe, "or if an' ol' non-producin' relict like you needs gilt-buckled galluses onto him, go out an' earn 'em. You ain't earned a dollar into two years an' it costs more to feed you nor a team of camels."

"Wal, I give you an' Myra this here farm when you an' her was hitched, didn't I?" complained the old man. "If I'd on'y a-known then I was a-goin' to git this sort o' treatment I'd a-et that deed afore I'd signed it. I reckon you're both prayin' fer me to die, *but I wun't!*"

Rufe Pebbles laughed harshly.

"Prayin' fer you to die!" he sneered. "I ain't wastin' no prayers thataway. You're so consarned tough, the tooth o' time hain't even made a dent into you. You ain't huming, you ol' hoptoad. You et ernuff pancakes fer breakfast to choke a mule an' it ain't even give you dyspepsy. But I reckon you'll git a stroke o' some kind if I ketch you wearin' them Sunday galluses o' mine agin!"

After a futile effort to give his wife's father's whiskers another yank, the hulking Mr. Pebbles lumbered out of the little vine-clad cottage and went off to his haying.

When Mrs. Myra Pebbles came in with the milk, she stopped with a sudden start just inside the threshold. Her venerable parent was standing before a mirror making wild passes in the air with both fists. Now and then he would stop and bunch the little knob of biceps on his skinny right arm. His teeth were set and his eyes blazed with the fires of hate.

"Paw Blossom!" cried out Myra Pebbles, after she had watched the strange pantomime for several minutes, "be you gone total daft?"

The old man wheeled round and dropped his arms.

"I was exercisin', Myra," he said sheep-

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ishly, "tryin' to work some o' the rheumatiz out o' me afore the picnic."

"Afore the picnic!" said Mrs. Pebbles sharply, rubbing her red, pointed nose. "Afore the picnic!" she added with the same mouse-trap expression. "Don't you know Rufe has got to go to the picnic? He's goin' to put on boxin' gloves or sunthin' with six men all to oncet, an' Squire Baldwin is payin' him ten dollars fer it. You got to stay home an' feed the pigs, paw. You been to ernuff picnics."

The shock was too much for Gerald Blossom to absorb all at once. For sixty-five years he had never missed the Thumb Point picnic. When a youth he had been the champion middleweight boxer and wrestler of Cedar Grove, Thumb Point and Great Notch. The great August picnic was the occasion when he and his old cronies got together and entered into violent discussion of the triumphs of their younger days. He had often argued with himself that he would sacrifice his right arm rather than give up the annual post-harvest reunion, and here he was confronted with that awful calamity.

THE position of Gerald Blossom in the Pebbles household was not that of a dominant factor. Had he been able to sit down and analyze the situation, he would have swiftly arrived at the conclusion that he was more or less of a weightless atom. His daughter had never manifested anything approaching filial reverence at any stage of her career. What little fondness she seemed to possess for her parent had evidently taken wings when she gave her heart and hand to the young giant whose name she bore. As for Rufe Pebbles, he had been brought up by hand by a hard-fisted uncle who boasted that he wore out a balestick a week in an effort at discipline. He had lavished the rod and turned out a bully; for the moment Rufe realized his amazing strength he turned upon his avuncular guardian and repaid with good measure a thousand lickings.

Since then, he had shifted for himself and managed to get a good start in the world when he married Myra Blossom and bullied her father into deeding away his farm. Once the deed was signed, the old man was treated without the least attempt at respect for his gray hair and wrinkles.

Luckily for Mr. Blossom he was neither sensitive nor possessed of a good memory. His appetite had never failed him and his sharp fits of resentment were swiftly forgotten in the prodigious meals he was capable of absorbing. But this matter of the picnic was a blow that fairly hammered him flat. Ten days after he had been notified by his daughter that he would have to stay home and feed the pigs his bitterness had intensified rather than diminished. With the picnic only two days away he was almost frantic.

"Rufe," he began in a wheedling tone at the breakfast-table, "can't them pigs wait till sundown? I kin give 'em an extry feedin' come mornin'."

"No!" yelled the unfeeling son-in-law.

"What if I wun't?" ventured the old man a little more boldly.

"You dasen't wun't!" bellowed the young man, and when he let go of Mr. Blossom's ear the persecuted octogenarian had repeated seven times that he "dasen't wun't."

There were tears in the old man's eyes that afternoon as he stopped in front of Wally Dobbs' gate and returned that hearty young man's salutation.

"Come on in, Mr. Blossom!" cried the good natured Dobbs. "I want you to take a look at that cow Buttercup o' mine what were struck by lightnin'. She come up on her feet this mornin' an' et most a bale o' hay. There's sunthin' funny about her, fer every time I lay my hand on her back, sparks shoot offen her tail. Do you reckon any o' that lightnin' went on inside o' her?"

Mr. Blossom inspected the cow without interest and replied absently that he wished lightnin' would hit some folks "instid o' live stock." He was persuaded to assist in the milking, however, and found it no gentle task to hold Buttercup squarely in her stall while Wally Dobbs filled a ten-quart can. When he had finished and set the can outside the barn door Buttercup's owner exclaimed:

"Sufferin' wildcats, but ain't that milk blue!"

"Looks like it were watered," mumbled Mr. Blossom.

"Mebbe it's the lightnin'," ventured Mr. Dobbs. "I reckon I better feed it to the pigs."

"Gimme a taste first," said Mr. Blossom, wincing at mention of pigs. "Rufe's sellin' all his milk an' I hain't had a taste in a week."

Provided with a dipper Mr. Blossom helped himself. At the very first mouthful

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he smacked his lips and began to breathe quickly. When he had emptied the dipper he threw out his chest and expanded his lungs.

"It certain is refreshin', Wally," he cried. "Makes me feel like I were ten year younger already. Jes' try it."

"Can't bear the taste o' milk, Mr. Blossom," returned Dobbs. "None o' our folks drink milk. Take some more."

The venerable Thumb Pointer filled and drained the dipper again, and again he smacked his lips.

"Makes me feel twenty year younger," he chirped, then suddenly dumfounded Mr. Dobbs by turning a handspring and vaulting a five-barred fence. He came back over the fence from almost a standing jump. Wally Dobbs' little black eyes seemed in imminent peril of leaping from their sockets.

"Sometherin' soapweed!" he whistled. "Tarnation geewhillikins!" he ejaculated, then fell speechless.

"Jest like I used to do at the picnic forty year ago?" boasted the rejuvenated Gerald Blossom.

"If you kin do it day arter to-morrer, you'll git a prize sure," said the still stupefied Dobbs.

"Ain't goin'!" blurted Mr. Blossom.

"Ain't goin'!" repeated Dobbs. "Why ain't you goin'?"

"Gotter stay home an' feed the pigs. Rufe's goin'. He's a-goin' to box or sunthin'. Wun't tell me jest what."

"Why, ain't you hearn tell o' the big boxin' match?" cried Dobbs. "That'll be the big doin's o' the day. Rufe allows he kin lick any six boxers in the county, one arter t' other. He's terrible strong an' I reckon he kin do it."

"He's strong ernuff," assented Mr. Blossom acidly, "but he ain't scientific. Forty year ago I licked bigger men nor he by wearin' an' worritin' 'em."

The old man filled the dipper again and sucked down the bluish liquid at a gulp.

"Feel jest like I did in them days," he sang out as he turned a back flipflap, landing squarely on his feet. "Feel better'n I did in them days," he cried as he plucked a small boulder from the ground and hurled it over the hen-house.

"Wally Dobbs," he shrilled, "this milk burns into you stronger nor applejack! I bet I could lick two men bigger 'n Rufe Pebbles this minute!"

Seemingly unable to control himself, the old man shot a right hook into Wally Dobbs' broad chest that sprawled him on the ground.

AS WALLY DOBBS sat up and rubbed his eye she muttered vaguely, "Sure as shootin'-stars there's lightnin' into that milk!"

Then, as he saw Mr. Blossom about to pick up the dipper again, he yelled out:

"Not another drop o' that milk to-day, Gerald Blossom! You'll be doin' murder! You'll be killin' off your family!"

"I wanter go home an' lick that big bully afore sundown!" retorted Mr. Blossom, plucking a nail out of a plank and bending it between his thumb and forefinger. "If I don't," he growled, "I'll be trod onto till I die. An' I wanter go to that picnic."

Again he reached for the dipper, but Wally Dobbs scrambled to his feet and intercepted him.

"Wait a minute, you ol' whirlwind," gasped Dobbs. "I got a notion. Squire Baldwin tol' me this mornin' that some o' the six boxers what volunteered to stand up agin Rufe wun't show up. I kin fix it so you kin git a chance agin that son-in-law o' yourn in a way he'll never git over. Soon as the folks start fer that picnic you come here an' I'll shave off them whiskers an' black you up like an Injin. I got a walnut stain what'll do it. Then we'll take a couple o' quarts o' that milk along an' if it works onto you like to-day Rufe Pebbles'll git what is past due an' comin' to 'im!"

It took some time for this idea to sink into the inflamed gray matter of the rejuvenated octogenarian, but at last he got it and uttered a whoop of joy. He became so enthusiastic that he tore up a young apple tree by the roots and might have ruined the whole plan by going home and performing miraculous tasks of strength had not the astute Wally Dobbs had the wit to take him behind the barn and put him to work on three cords of wood.

Gerald Blossom was glowing and glistening like a ripe pippin after a heavy rain when he put down the bucksaw. The stimulating effect of the electrified milk had not been entirely eliminated, however. He set off up the Van Giesen Gap road at a pace that highly amused a pair of hoboes who were sitting on a fence, chewing straw.

"Look out there, gran'pop, you'll burn up your speedometer!" shouted one of the

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tramps, and his companion guffawed long and loud.

Mr. Blossom stopped suddenly and wheeled round.

"Keep a civil tongue into your heads, you low-down road-dusters," he flung at them, "or I'll hop over there an' knock your heads together!"

The laughter this threat elicited echoed and reëchoed throughout the valley. But the mirth of the two itinerant wanderers was not prolonged. The Thumb Point ancient got to them in two bounds and by the time they had recovered their senses he was seated at the supper-table in the Pebbles cottage making inroads into a side of cornbeef that caused his son-in-law to gasp and pant in an effort to stifle his emotions.

One of the hoboes was draped over the stout limb of an apple tree when he came to. His eyes roved round wildly till they found his comrade crawling up out of the dry bed of the creek that wound through the orchard.

"Was it wind or lightnin', pard?" asked the tattered ornament of the apple-tree.

Hobo No. 2 did not reply until he had regained his feet. Then he answered huskily:

"'Twarn't neither, Jim. 'Tware a he-witch with iron feet an' tiger claws. Come, pal, let's crawl, an' afore we start, chalk the fence with a two-pronged X, so's the club'll skip this landscape." And as soon as the pair could gear their shoe-leather they burned through the Gap on a high-heel sprint.

Mr. Blossom's Cyclopean appetite remained with him until the morning of the day of the picnic. Time and again his daughter and son-in-law had warned him that he would choke or bring on a stroke, but they both refrained from mentioning the picnic, feeling slightly conscious that they were depriving the old man of the dearest moment of the year.

Upon the advice of Wally Dobbs, Mr. Blossom had rubbed his eyes with onion peel, so that he managed to weep and sigh through each meal.

"He feels it terrible, Rufe," remarked Myra Pebbles to her husband. "He says he ain't missed the picnic in sixty year."

"Nor he ain't missed a meal in eighty," retorted Rufe Pebbles. "Fer a man who's all et up with grief he's got a inhuming appetite. He's a reg'lar ol' bore-kinstricter, an' he's gotter stay home an' feed them pigs!"

BUT on the morning of the day of the picnic Mr. Blossom astounded the Pebbles by failing to touch a morsel of food. Wally Dobbs had advised him that if he drank Buttercup's milk on an empty stomach he would be more certain of results.

"There's still lightnin' into that milk," declared Dobbs. "I give a saucerful to that ol' dog Frisk o' mine an' he went up to Frank Rue's an' licked that young mastiff o' his not'thstandin' he's on'y got one tooth."

"Air you sick," Rufe Pebbles asked his father-in-law when he noticed that he failed to partake of breakfast, "or air you jest puttin' on fer sympathy?"

"Sympathy!" rasped Mr. Blossom. "There ain't no such thing onto this farm! You ain't got it an' Myra ain't got it. But look out, Rufe Pebbles; that there grin o' yours is a-goin' to warp round to t'other side o' your face afore you're a day older. Wally Dobbs says he's got a battlin' whirlwind what'll take your measure at the picnic this arternoon—a little feller stronger nor nine wildcats. It'll on'y be a jedgment onto you fer treatin' an ol' man crueler nor you would a dog."

Rufe Pebbles' brow darkened.

"There's a-goin' to be a jedgment onto me, eh?" he snarled. "Wally Dobbs has got a wildcat boxer, has 'e? Wal, I'll 'tend to him, Paw Blossom, an' I'll 'tend to Wally Dobbs an' the hull Dobbs family. There ain't no ten men in these parts I couldn't lick one-handed, an' don't you forgit it."

The young farmer rolled back his sleeve from an arm that resembled a knotted branch of an oak.

Old Mr. Blossom backed away from the mighty arm of his son-in-law and a vague alarm began to chill his blood. Thirty-six hours had passed since he had partaken of Buttercup's milk and the stimulus it had imparted had petered out. He sank into forlorn eclipse until after Rufe and Myra had driven off to the picnic and there was not even a reminiscent hint of a conquering hero in his appearance when he slunk into the back gate and found his way to Wally Dobbs' barn.

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Myra Pebbles had been almost touched by the wobegone expression on her father's face as he hung listlessly over the fence and watched her and Rufe depart.

"He looks awful pitiful, Rufe," she murmured. "If on'y Ole Jensen hadn't gone off on a rip we might've took him."

"He's better off to home with the pigs," barked the stony-hearted Pebbles.

"He give us the farm," ventured Mrs. Pebbles.

But her husband appeared not to hear her and the attention of the young couple was soon distracted by the appearance of a procession of rigs along the near-by Pompton turnpike, which they joined at the junction of the two roads. Thereafter their thoughts did not recur to Gerald Blossom until after the big feed in the walnut grove, when they caught sight of Wally Dobbs driving through the picnic grounds in his buggy with a strange little man bundled up in blankets seated at his side.

Rufe Pebbles was getting ready for the great boxing event, having removed his boots and replaced them with a pair of light shoes. A ring had been staked off in the meadow down by the river and Squire Baldwin was assembling the several volunteer victims and their seconds.

The victims were four husky looking young men regarded as athletes of great prowess in their villages, yet conceded as undoubted victims by all who had ever seen the mighty Rufe Pebbles in action.

"There's on'y four on 'em 'stead o' six, Rufe," said Myra Pebbles, with a nervous laugh. "I reckon the other two backed out. Paw Blossom must've been jokin' 'bout Wally Dobbs, for that little Injin-faced shrimp what's ridin' with him ain't no bigger'n a triffet. An' he's all done up in blankets like he was tremblin' o' fright."

"He'll be shakin' worse nor that if he gits into the ring along of Rufe Pebbles," rumbled the rustic man-killer, "but you run along up with the womenfolks, Myra. Ain't no petticoats allowed at this little exercisin' match o' mine. I wun't be long, gal—about a minute to each one!"

A throng of several hundred men were gathered about the ring when Rufe Pebbles reached the side of Squire Baldwin, referee and master of ceremonies.

"You're sure this candidate o' yourn ain't no professional?" Squire Baldwin was saying to Wally Dobbs. "'Cause professionals is barred out o' this picnic."

"He ain't no more professional nor what you are, Squire," replied Dobbs, "an' he ain't a third the size o' Rufe Pebbles. There he is up into my buggy, pantin' anxious to git into the ring. It'll be a favor to both on us if you'll give 'im first crack at Rufe. O' course, if the other candidates object, we——"

The other candidates fairly clamored that they did not object and that the stranger was nine times welcome to the first three rounds of punishment that Rufe Pebbles was capable of inflicting.

"Wait a minute," interposed the man-killer. "What's the name o' this stranger? An' if he's too dinged small I ain't a-goin' to take no chances o' murder. From what I kin see o' him, he wouldn't last more'n six minutes with a jackrabbit."

"He don't want his name known," replied Wally Dobbs, "but his initials is G. B. an' he lives into this county. As for lastin' six minutes with a jackrabbit, he'll last long ernuff fer Rufe Pebbles to holler fer mercy, an' I got ten dollars to bet onto it."

Rufe Pebbles doubled up with laughter till he caught sight of the ten-dollar bill that Wally Dobbs shook in his face.

"You ain't ser'us, Wally," he cried, straightening up.

"Put up your ten an' Squire Baldwin kin hold stakes," was Wally Dobbs' curt reply.

Rufe Pebbles emitted another outburst of laughter, and still shaking, counted out ten dollars into Squire Baldwin's palm.

"You'll stand to witness, Squire," he chuckled, "that I been led into this bettin' agin my will, but I wun't hurt this little feller no more nor necessary to win that ten."

SHOUTS of derision greeted Wally Dobbs as he assisted the blanketed unknown to dismount from the buggy. None laughed harder than the four candidates who had so precipitately yielded place to the newcomer, for Wally Dobbs had drawn out from under the seat of the buggy two milking bottles fitted with the conventional rubber stems. Just before he reached the fringe of the crowd about the ring, he passed one of the bottles to the unknown.

"On'y a couple o' pulls," he enjoined him, "'cause it makes you too fierce."

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In spite of this caution, the unknown had drained half the contents of the bottle before his manager and second could get it away from him.

The crowd opened a lane through which Wally Dobbs and his candidate were permitted to walk. Many in the crowd on the ground were holding their sides. As the blanket that wound the unknown was blown by the wind there were revealed two pipe-stem legs clad in brown stockings and a pair of flapping knickerbockers that were palpably cut down from pants.

"Bet he don't weigh a hundred pounds," roared young Phineas Whackersinger, Jr., whereupon there followed a bale of comments that provoked gale after gale of laughter.

Even the stern and dignified Squire Baldwin covered his face with one hand as he extended the other to shake hands with Wally Dobbs' candidate, but the grip he got from the wrinkled brown hand of the little unknown erased his grin and made his muscles jump with pain.

Rufe Pebbles positively could not afford more than one glance at the grotesque little figure, he was so shaken with spasms of mirth. When he had taken his corner in the ring and tied on his eight-ounce gloves, he felt as weak as it is possible for a Hercules of his build to feel and his eyes swam with laughter.

Wally Dobbs had led the unknown to his corner and, with difficulty, got on his gloves. The dusky little lightweight could not seem to sit still and he was breathing like a young steam-engine on the point of explosion. To the few observers who drew comparisons his little brown hairless head looked like a great walnut. He never opened his lips to disclose whether or not he had teeth and his eyes never wavered from the gigantic frame of Rufe Pebbles sitting opposite and joking uproariously with his seconds.

When all was in readiness and Squire Baldwin took his place in the middle of the ring as referee, the jam of spectators about the ringside were faint with laughing and leaned upon one another for support. An intense hush fell upon them as Squire Baldwin announced:

"The first o' the five candidates what offer an' volunteer fer two dollars per each to stand up agin Rufe Pebbles fer three rounds apiece don't care to tell his name, an' it ain't necessary fer him to give it lessen he's injured ser'us. Under the rules o' this contest he's got till I count ten to back out."

Squire Baldwin counted ten with painful deliberation and while he was counting, the unknown seized the bottle of milk he had started on and took another long pull. Then he jumped to his feet and sprang into the center of the ring. Rufe Pebbles got up and lumbered over, permitting Squire Baldwin to perform the customary function of joining hands, dropping them, and exclaiming, "Go!"

At the word "Go!" the little unknown landed a wallop on the point of Rufe Pebbles' chin that shook all his teeth. The biff of the glove could be heard by the deafest nonagenarian among the spectators. The smile left Rufe Pebbles' lips as if it had been cross-circuited and his eyes began to glow with rage,

"Come on, you big ox!" challenged the unknown, dancing with the speed of a shadow, and before Pebbles could loosen up the heavy muscles of his great arms, he had received a staggering jolt in the stomach that caused him to utter an explosive "Woof!"

This was too much and he swung his huge fist, thinking to dispose of the pesky little critter with one tap. But he swung a mile wide and, as his weight went with the swing, the unknown dodged like a streak of lightning and rained a shower of thudding jolts on the giant's left ear. When Pebbles caught his balance he wheeled round viciously and made the air sing with a wild wallop. This lurch threw him to his knees and the crowd gasped with astonishment.

Rufe Pebbles muttered a savage oath as he got up and spun about in search of his antagonist. He might as well have searched for a little brown gnome. Whichever way he turned was the wrong way and at every turn something that felt like a sledge hammer hit him in the stomach or on the point of the jaw. One terrific crack had smashed his nose almost flat and he was rapidly developing a cauliflower ear. He was staggering all over the ring when Squire Baldwin called time.

While Pebbles' seconds were busily fanning him, Wally Dobbs was whispering in the ear of his unknown:

"Not another drop out o' that bottle, Gerald Blossom, or you'll do murder! He can't last another round an' he's mad

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ernuff to clinch onto you an' bite your ear off!"

"Let 'im try it!" muttered the electrified octogenarian. "I'm a-goin' to clinch onto him this round an' throw him over the ropes like I done with Walter Buckle o' Singac, forty-four year ago! I'm a-goin' to make him yelp for mercy like a ki-yi pup!"

AT THE opening of the second round the spectators about the ring more closely resembled wooden dummies than men. Their jaws hung pendant and their eyes popped with a bullfrog stare.

Rufe Pebbles came out of his corner with the rush of an enraged grizzly. He led for his diminutive opponent with what would have been a lethal swing had it landed. But the unknown was in and out three times while Rufe's leg-o'-mutton fist was still carving the air, and before the young giant had recovered his balance he suffered a steam-hammer tattoo of blows upon his nose and chin.

"Clinch 'im, Rufe!" urged one of Pebbles' seconds. "Back 'im into the ropes an' smash 'im!"

But, as it fell out, it was not the Ajax of Thumb Point who did the clinching. Wally Dobbs' battling whirlwind rushed in on the giant and caught him about the belt. The gaping onlookers were positively petrified with wonder when they saw the 275-pound Rufe Pebbles simply twirled off the ground by his midget foe and thrown over the ropes. He fell heavily and lay gasping like a stranded carp!

"Git up an' fight, you big gawk!" the unknown shrilled down at him. "I've on'y started onto you."

But Rufe Pebbles failed to rise. A nameless fear gripped his heart.

"He ain't huming!" he mumbled to his seconds. "Take me home! Send for Myra! Keep 'im off! Take 'im away!"

Gerald Blossom's son-in-law was fairly blubbering and the picnic was thrown into an uproar. In the excitement Wally Dobbs and his unknown vanished.

WHEN Rufe Pebbles arrived at his home he was still muttering inane and broken sentences and his wife had to assist him down from the buggy. His massive legs shook and trembled as he staggered to the door of the kitchen and living-room. Myra Pebbles drove the buggy to the barn and had started to unhitch the team when she was suddenly startled by her husband's voice.

"Take 'im away! Take 'im away!" rolled out to her in accents of craven fear.

She rushed to the rescue, seizing a balestick as she ran. She dropped the weapon and stood rooted to the floor the moment she crossed the threshold of the kitchen.

Rufe Pebbles was on his knees, wringing his hands in an attitude of supplication, while there towered above him a familiar yet unfamiliar figure—Wally Dobbs' unknown returned into the customary raiment of Gerald Blossom.

"Paw Blossom," cried Myra Pebbles, faintly, "it ain't possible——"

"'Tis an' is," thundered Gerald Blossom, "an' I ain't finished with this bullyin', brow-beatin' husban' o' yourn! You sign this here deed an' dokkermint givin' back my lawful property, the two on you, lessen you want whirlwinds an' wildcats scatterin' the chaff o' the earth onto you!"

And they signed with all the haste their trembling hands were capable of.

Mr. Blossom carried the deed up to Wally Dobbs and handed it to him.

"You better keep it fer me, Wally," he said, "fer they might change their minds an' burn it. An' afore I go home you better give me another cup o' that milk."

"Not another drop o' that lightnin' milk, Gerald Blossom!" Wally Dobbs returned vehemently. "You cracked three o' my ribs comin' home from the picnic, jest nudgin' me playful! I chucked the rest o' that milk into the duck pond. You got your farm back an' that oughter be ernuff. Rufe Pebbles ain't no better nor your hired man from this day on."

"An' wun't that cow give no more o' that milk?" asked the old man ruefully.

"I reckon not," responded Buttercup's owner. "I jest milked her an' she was ca'm an' plakid an' the milk were richer nor Cedar Grove cream. That bolt o' lightnin' must've gone out total in that ten-quart milkin'. It sure were uncommonary."

"It were," agreed Mr. Blossom, "an' it were a blessin' out o' heaven fer me." Whereat the rehabilitated octogenarian bade his friend good-night and returned to *his* farm.

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The Kid-nap Case

by

Jonathan Hadley

THE green lights shone from the newspaper windows, high above Park Row, as the evening lull sank with the darkness over the lower city. The current of men and women which for two hours had flowed up Broadway and the "Nassau Canyon," around and across the square, had churned into the entrance of Brooklyn Bridge and gone. Mail vans blocked against the post-office, the clang of the street cars, swift and empty. Occasional pedestrians alone were left behind. Yet the briskness of all moving objects denoted a reawakening; the day of the night-workers had begun.

Jim Wheeler stood in the doorway of a slender, tower-like building, moodily looking across the park. Though his lips were still, his face exuded profanity. This was the night for which he buoyed himself through all the other six—his "night off."

And now there was not a thing to do; not a thing through all those stupid hours till morning, when habit would let him sleep. It was getting to be too old a story, this being broke, with no one to finance a festive evening. He had come down to pick up an extra assignment, if he could, but had found the office full of idle, waiting men; and they, discerning another quest upon his genial features, had skillfully side-stepped him.

"I kind of wish," he thought, "that I was like those 'boes out there," he indicated two vagrants on the sidewalk, gazing at the bulletin-board above his head, "but when your nerves are screwed so tight through six days in the week, they won't unwind for the seventh."

With a degree of whimsical interest his eyes passed up and down the two tramps, settling finally upon their faces.

"What can they be up to now? They aren't 'boes; they're strong-arms. One's a dope-artist, too—the whitish one."

Almost simultaneously the two men caught his eye. At once they shuffled away—one to the north and one to the south. Jim smiled. He was adept enough, as a police reporter, to note the fractional pause of the man who had turned to the south.

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"Proving," he commented, with his interest rising, "that it's up Park Row, whatever it may be."

He moved out on the sidewalk to inspect the bulletin. He gasped, and his heart tugged at its arteries.

"The kidnap case!" he exclaimed. That was the biggest "story" of the fortnight and, although he had not been assigned to it himself, he had watched its handling with professional interest.

The bulletin read:

Perceval Van Iderstein, President of the Pan-American Bank, offers a reward of $10,000 for any information regarding the whereabouts of his daughter, Dorothy Van Iderstein, who was stolen from her nurse in Central Park two weeks ago to-day. For the safe return of the child, entire immunity is promised to the deliverers and, in addition, a reward of $25,000.

He continued to stare at the announcement, reading and rereading it.

"So *that's* what they were looking at—*that!*"

What was their nationality? Italian, no doubt. He paced back and forth in the hallway with the blood pumping through his brain. He stopped to light a cigarette.

"But," he presently considered, "why assume that they are Dagoes—everybody did that, just because it's a kidnap proposition. And for two weeks they have dragged the Wop quarters with a fine-tooth comb."

Slowly but steadily, as a camera plate develops, the faces of the men grew in his mind. He could do that—take a snapshot with a glance, and afterward, if he needed them, materialize the details.

"Brown-skinned, except for the dope tint," he recalled, "but with a queer, bluish tinge underneath. Arabs? Not quite, but with the same deep, swimming eyes—unique, distinctive."

He laughed abruptly, almost sheepishly. Who would most naturally be stealing children, if not Gipsies? He thrilled with the conclusion, but this soon ebbed away. Gipsies should be found in the Sicilian neighborhoods; and he could be positive that no kidnapped child was now concealed in any Italian district. As for the Yiddish city—well, that was too easy for the detectives.

"It's some place," he mused, "some place on this island where the police can not touch bottom. The answer to that is simple enough, but—still, it hooks together rather neatly; the dope-fiend and Chinatown!"

HIS course lay up Park Row, and he struck out hurriedly to think while he was walking. Past Brooklyn Bridge the street grew dirty, with the curious repulsive scent which indicates the frontier of the Ghetto. The elevated tracks swung overhead, but the way was bright, almost a glare, from windows filled with shoddy merchandise, and the electric invitations of saloons. He took note of every loafer in the doorways, and of the human wrecks which drifted by, but, as he expected, saw no suggestion toward his clue.

Ten minutes later the road came to an end and he found himself in dark, thief-haunted Chatham Square. The Bowery emptied in from the north, and to the west ran off the gaudy lanes of Chinatown. The junction of two elevated railways overhead kept the quarter in perpetual gloom. Jim hesitated for a moment; in some direction from this grimy hub, he knew, the two Gipsies had ventured out.

There was a place, somewhere beneath the crooked ways of Chinatown, which altogether baffled the police. They raided it whenever they could find another entrance; but, except for the pungent smell of opium, they had never found a trace of life or guilt. Even the most elaborately planned invasions, with every outlet guarded, had shown no more than a vacant cellar, walled with stone. And many grewsome superstitions had grown up among the Chinatown patrolmen regarding this intangible, elusive dive.

Pushing to the west, past cubbyhole stores and chop-suey restaurants, Jim came up to "Chee Chow and Company." A young Chinaman sat in the doorway.

"Hello, On Hing."

The young man's head gave a hospitable duck.

"Hello, Missa Wheela', you come in have ciga'?"

"No, On Hing, not to-night. But say," he drew nearer and dropped his tone, "I like-a—I like-a—smoke-um pipe."

On Hing's features spread into a wide, delighted grin.

"Sho', sho', me sabee."

"All light, find-um place."

On Hing lifted up a pair of inscrutable eyes. Wheeler dropped a quarter into his hand. The grin returned.

"All-ligh'—all-ligh'."

Disappearing into the store, On Hing came out wearing his prim, uncreased felt

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hat. It was supported by his cue, done up behind, and made a superlative failure in millinery. He led Jim farther west, beneath the lights and filigree—the Oriental touches, heightened by the sound of language in a minor key—the feline wail of a Chinese fiddle. They turned over into Pell Street, and then backward into Doyers, where they passed through a load of tourists on the corner, holding hands for protection.

Up Doyers On Hing wound with his padded shoes, crushed down at the heel, flapping against his stockings. Jim, following on the narrow ledge behind, watched his movements most intently.

Suddenly On Hing pointed across the alley.

"See-um—China baby," he laughed, pointing at two inconceivably tiny tots, blinking out of a window.

Jim gave an instantaneous glance, not at the babies, but exactly opposite; his eyes swept in the entrance of the tea store they were passing.

A few doors farther up the street, On Hing turned into a small café, and kept on through to a back-room, where, behind some screens, ingeniously arranged, they came into an apartment, cheaply, showily furnished in Chinese comfort. Opium pipes lay on the table.

Jim sharply faced On Hing around by the shoulder.

"You think-um me jay-hawker—rubber-neck wagon sport?"

He appended a shove which started the Chinaman, with a naive grin, out of the café. On Hing then swung down toward the Bowery, but Wheeler commanded:

"No; back the same way."

As they came to the tea and rice store again, almost imperceptibly, but to Wheeler distinctly, On Hing's stride quickened. Even with the door, he abruptly asked the time; and although Jim took out his watch, his eye remained on the store-front. He soon dismissed the Chinaman in feigned disgust, after he had been led into one or two more show-places.

HALF an hour later, when he had returned from a costumer's on the Bowery, he entered Doyers Street once more. His clothes were aged and soiled. In place of a collar, a red flannel shirt appeared at his throat. A gangrened derby, mashed in at the side, slanted upon his head; one shoe was minus a heel, four toes leaked from another. His face was given a single, unmistakable hue, in which the eyes, like great dark wells, sank back into the dryish whiteness of his skin.

Wheeler pushed in the door of the rice and tea store, and swayed unsteadily before the proprietor, Gu Fong, who sullenly looked up from his counting-beads.

"Smoke-um hop," said Jim huskily.

The Chinaman shook his head.

"No catch-ee pipe he-ah," he answered.

Jim held out a half-dollar. The merchant's pupils glittered in the candlelight, but he shook his head once more. A dollar bill was equally fruitless.

"No smoke-um he-ah," he repeated.

Jim turned slowly toward the door, making the best of a legitimate reluctance. Through the glass he saw a great blue figure, standing under a street-lamp. He fell to the floor as if shot. With one or two springs, he landed behind the counter.

"Whazza malla?" cried Gu Fong sharply.

Jim pointed toward the street. The Chinaman tiptoed to the window, then dodged back as if jerked from behind. Captain Mike Hooran, "the Czar of Chinatown," was loitering across the way.

"All-ligh'," he said hurriedly. "Giv-a me dolla'; you smoke-um hop!"

At the rear of the room a door was concealed behind some bales of rice. but Gu Fong veered off to one edge and slipped along the wall in the crevice behind. Jim was at his elbow. The door opened into a storeroom which, by the evidence of a lantern, was filled only with tissue-covered boxes, earthen gin-jugs and wicker-bales. But Gu Fong bent over and lifted up a trap-door—a row of steps dropped down into the darkness. He pointed into the opening.

"De-ah," he said, "Down de-ah."

Jim shrank back. Anything might lie at the bottom of the steps. Considering a moment, he felt of his revolver for reassurance, then bolted down.

The rock-hewn passage in which he found himself appeared, in the light of the matches which he struck, to end completely not more than fifteen feet ahead of him. On following it out, however, he came upon a narrow slit at one corner, so thoroughly concealed by jutting stone that if he had stopped two feet short of the termination, he would have missed it.

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Through this he was able to slide, and, in a parallel passage, he veritably doubled back on the trail he had taken. He advanced to a point where five of these burrowings came together. Tearing a strip from the sleeve of his shirt, he tied it to a sharp point of stone in the one from which he had emerged.

All but one of the ways were black; but some little distance down this one, a dull light glowed up from the ground. As he followed along this path he saw that the walls were of chiseled stone, moist and dripping; and he knew that he was penetrating the foundations of a building—how far removed or in what direction from the one which he had entered, he had no way to guess. Presently he was standing over a hole, into which a ladder fell. This was no time for hesitation, so he immediately started down.

The cellar was not so dismal as it had looked from above, but very murky in the rays of a diminutive lamp. He knew the smell—opium. In a corner, on one of the rigid beds, a Chinaman lay, disheveled, smoking a long-stemmed pipe; and while the charge in the little bowl dripped and sputtered greasily, his eyes seemed covered with a film, like those of a drowsy chicken. At the table on which the lamp was standing, two sordid-looking Chinamen were gambling. There was one more individual in the room, huddled on a stool and dozing against the wall. His face was altogether bloodless, furrowed and flabby with vice. Jim's fingernails dug into his palms—it was the man who, from the bulletin-board, had started south!

The card-players scanned the reporter malignantly.

"Pipe!" he said.

Not a nerve of expression changed in the two Chinamen. Their flat faces were simply turned in his direction.

Jim produced the fifty-cent piece and laid it on the table, but, at the same time, he managed to pull out a five-dollar bill (his much overdue room rent) which, with bunglesome haste, he thrust back into his pocket. But it was enough to make the Chinamen relax. One of them rose, motioning Jim to a hard bed in the corner. On a tray he brought him the kit—a long-stemmed pipe, with the thimble-bowl, a little torch lamp, and a jar of opium.

Jim, understanding that there were but a few puffs in each bowlful, took each as sparingly as he dared, and let the substance fry and burn up of itself. He puttered along, moreover, through as much time as he could in refilling and relighting. He reclined on one arm, in the accepted posture, holding the pipe with the other, his head turned upward toward the ceiling and his eyes three-quarters closed.

AFTER a suitable interval he allowed himself to slip farther down on the bed, and the pipe loosened in his fingers. The card-players paused and looked. They need wait no longer, as to the five dollars. There was something catlike in the slight contraction of their limbs and bodies, as they made ready to start. They rose from the table. Jim sat up sleepily and began to refill his pipe. The Chinamen relapsed into their game.

The reporter's heart halted; his blood lay still. He had heard—he could swear—the sob of a child!

As soon as he dared he opened his eyes in full. All was serene. There was not the faintest hint of such an impression. His forehead glistened, as if a damp thought had traveled through his mind.

"The opium," he concluded. "I've got to be more careful."

Lifting himself upon his elbow, with the utmost deliberation, he began to shake out the pipe. Again the sob—and the voice was in the very room! He let not so much as an eyelid flick, as he went on with his task. There was absolutely nothing behind which a creature could be hidden. The table, the slatted beds, four stools, bare stone walls—that was all. And yet the voice was in the room.

The first few words of a cradle lullaby, in thin, sweet tones, sounded almost at hand, when there was a blow, a muffled cry, and all was quiet.

The reporter eased back on the hard pillow. The Gipsy remained in his soggy doze; the smoker on the other bed had long since become oblivious; the gamblers played right on. They were too accomplished in deception to cast so much as a glance at him to see whether he had heard.

Jim lay for a considerable period without moving. The filmy outlines of a dream rose in his mind; then great, vague doubts came trooping in. Could the sound have come from the drug he had assimilated, or

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were the superstitions of the policemen true? Could this pit, after all, be visited with its memories? Might not the sobbing and the blow themselves, for his enlightenment, have been the mystic repetition of a crime?

A man was climbing down the ladder.

At the bottom he gazed around carefully, although he manifested no surprise at the reporter, apparently asleep, and asked no questions. From Gu Fong overhead, no doubt, he had learned the personnel of the room. Under his lashes Jim recognized the other man of the bulletin board.

The Gipsy shook his partner; the man regained intelligence slowly. He became alert enough, however, as the taller one, in a curious jargon, unfolded news.

From nods and vigorous gestures, the reporter interpreted the talk. The child, then, was alive. And they planned to set out immediately, but for some impediment. Presently Jim perceived that he was the impediment. At the direction of the Gipsy one of the Chinamen brought forth a rope from under the sheet of the other bed. At further instructions, he tore a long, narrow strip from the sheet—a blindfold, as Jim discerned. The reporter slid his hand for his revolver. His fingers became limp and weak with a discovery. It had slipped down into the torn lining of his pocket, and lying as he was, it was impossible to draw it!

The rope and bandage now were ready.

The Gipsy leader stopped a moment, however, to examine his pistol at the lamp on the table. Jim's brain seized out for lines of action; his eyes traversed, for an instant, every square inch of the room. They rested suddenly, however, upon an object near his bed. A crumpled Chinese newspaper lay on the floor beside him.

He propped himself on his elbow and rubbed his eyes. The four men regarded him. He reached, though, for his pipe and a bit of opium. They allowed him to proceed, for he could be but a few puffs from torpor, now, and then he could be handled as easily as a pillow.

Measuring the distance and calculating the chances, the reporter moved his lamp out toward the edge of the bed. Lighting his pipe with a taper, he fell back on the couch, and with his knee pushed over the lamp.

Screams in two languages told him the flame had caught. The fire leaped up to the sheet of the bed. Four men rushed toward the corner, With a swift bound, Jim went past them. He halted long enough to work loose his revolver, and as the others jumped and trampled on the paper and the sheet, he darted up the ladder rungs.

The shout which now broke forth below far outdid those that the fire had prompted. The ladder, jerked from the bottom, dropped out of the hole overhead and went crashing against the wall.

It stuck there for a second, and Jim, who had not lost his hold, whirled around in time to cover the group with his gun before they could pull loose the bottom again. Completely treed, he sat down on the top rung with his back to the wall.

MINUTES passed. Jim decided that he had at least enough of an advantage to let his attention ease off from the sight of his revolver. The hole in the ceiling was over against one wall, and in falling, the ladder had gone down but a few feet, before a chink in the stones of the floor had caught it. By standing up in full, he saw that he could reach the edge of the hole and swing himself through. But, of course, to stand up and reach overhead in the faces of the men at the foot of the ladder would be insane.

There came into his mind, then, a cowboy custom that he had read about. He doubted his ability to do it; but it was his only chance. He quickly veered his aim; one, two, three—five blinding bursts came from the barrel of his revolver. The last was followed by darkness; he had shot out the lamp!

Groping, he caught his hold and swung himself through the opening. While there was still confusion below, he made a rapid reconnoiter of the other passages and found every one stopped up and walled in from the outside. He ran along the way by which he had come, through the slit in the rock, back on his trail to the stairway. He tiptoed up the steps and raised the trap-door, only to look, behind the little black circle of a gun muzzle, into the placid countenance of Gu Fong. The trap-door was dropped on him. A bundle was thrown upon it, then another. He knew that Gu Fong was about to weight down the door securely. The dull glow of a light, quickly strengthening, showed at the end of the passage, through the slit. The men from the cellar would soon be up to him.

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Two bales only were on the door; Gu Fong had stepped to the wall for more. Crouched as Jim was, on the top step, all his muscles were in position for a spring. He threw open the door like a jack-in-the-box, and seized Gu Fong from behind. Whirling him around, he threw him bodily down the steps.

Standing on the door, he saw no way to secure it. In the hubbub below him now he dared not so much as step off to find weights for it. But then, the gang could easily tip him off from underneath.

The lantern light from the ceiling which caused the barrel of his revolver to glisten, disclosed to him that there was a crack, half or three-quarters of an inch wide, at the front of the door, where fingers could slip down to take their hold. He fell to his knees and shoved the barrel of the pistol into this aperture, and with his boot-heel drove it home. The door was securely spiked.

The reporter, hastening out through the store, stepped down into the street, and taking out a police whistle, blew a single note. To Patrolman Kelly he whispered a dozen words, exhibiting his police card. "You see, the street's already getting hep!" he said.

Even as he spoke, cautious eyes had appeared and vanished at a window opposite; around the corners and in the shadowy doorways loungers stopped to peer at him before they shambled on.

In a few moments—a very few—Captain Hooran himself, with half a dozen reserves, entered the store where the reporter was waiting. As Jim told the facts, the Captain swore.

"Been layin' fer that place fer seven years!"

When they opened the trap-door and inspected the passage with a dark lantern, the way was entirely clear. Down the stairway Jim piloted them, through the narrow fissure—a difficult squeeze for the enormous policemen—back on the parallel trail to the junction of the five pathways.

"Yes, I plugged up all of 'em," remarked the Captain.

They found no trace of any one in their advance. When they came up to the hole opening into the cellar it was utterly dark below. Captain Hooran leaned over and flashed his lantern into the vault.

A long, low oath, half of astonishment, half of conviction, was his report. Jim leaned over, too. He could not believe the lantern's rays. From corner to corner, from wall to wall, they simply revealed a vacuum! Not a human being was visible; not a table, a stool, nor a chair. The ladder also had vanished!

"I always said it 'uz haunted."

The Captain's voice could not govern a tremble. The policemen changed positions uncomfortably.

While waiting for one of the patrolmen to go back for a rope, the Captain spoke.

"Of course, we'll thry fer a trap. But that wouldn't never account fer how the furniture and ladder has disappeart. You says these things was here, yet you hardly need to 'uv, fer I can smell the smoke myself. But it's jist the same old story."

With the Captain in the lead, the men descended. They knelt down with their lanterns and rigidly scanned the floor for an aperture in the stones.

"If that don't beat ——!" whispered the Captain. "If it ain't sperrits, I think it's the devil himself."

Jim was devoid of language. He felt unnerved and numb. The superstitions of his companions also invaded him. He was staring blankly at the north wall when a qualm of sickness came over him. He cursed the opium that had stolen into his brain, for before his eyes the stones appeared to swell out ever so slightly, then suck back into a barely distinguishable arc. He turned his head away and swallowed whisky from his pocket flask. Nevertheless he said,

"Try every stone in the room."

The men went first to the south wall and, dividing up the space, began to hammer the masonry. No word was spoken, and there was no other sound than the ceaseless billeting. Every stone was firm. They passed on to the next. Not even a piece of mortar was dislocated.

The policemen stopped for breath. Their work had been severe and fast. They took their stations, then, before the north wall. With one action the six men swung their nightsticks. There was a sharp, brittle smash! A heavy "chug" followed; and the clubs, with a swish, slipped off the substance they had hit. Captain Hooran rushed forward with the lantern. The wall was swaying back and forth, flapping!

"Pull it down!" he shouted.

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A second later the partition was cluttered about their feet. Behind a jumble of furniture, five men were shrinking in a corner. There was little distinction of color, in the common illness of terror. Another Chinaman, in a lethargic sprawl, lay under a bed.

In the opposite corner, upon some bales of rice, a beautiful child was sleeping—a little girl with chestnut curls, upon whose cheek ran down the traces of a tear. Against the Gipsy hag who cringed beside her, she looked as if she had been lifted out of a fairy tableau.

An hour later, as Jim Wheeler, with Dorothy Van Iderstein in his arms, sped up Fifth Avenue in a taxicab, accompanied by Captain Hooran, the veteran policeman broke the silence,

"Pieces of slate, stuck on canvas and painted to look like stone, mortar an' all! Why, sir, no one but a Chink would have the devilish slickness to get away with that!"

Shuffled Cards

by Adolph Bennauer

TWO MEN sat at breakfast in the cabin of the ship *Equator* as she lay at her wharf in San Francisco bay. The one was Captain Older, commander of the vessel, the other his chief officer, Mr. Kerr.

"Sheer foolhardiness, sir, is what I call it," said the mate. "A thing like that should be kept secret till the vessel sails. But here's the whole affair in detail."

He caught up a newspaper and read the passage he had taken exception to:

The ship *Equator*, which clears to-morrow for Melbourne, will have on board half a million dollars in gold. Her commander, Captain Older, is one of the most trusted employees of the company and has been in their service for over twenty years.

The mate put down his paper and raised his eyes expectantly.

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"Well?" countered his superior officer, "what's the matter with that? I take it as a pretty neat compliment."

For an instant the mate regarded him disapprovingly.

"I mean the notice about the gold," he returned sourly. "It's enough to put life into a Dutchman. You know we haven't completed our crew yet, and when this gets into circulation we're going to be tackled by every bum in San Francisco. Better slip down the coast and pick up the rest of the men at Pedro."

"No," said the Captain thoughtfully, smoothing down his iron-gray hair, "that wouldn't do at all. You don't understand. I made the same argument to my owners and they laughed at me. Said the newspaper article would be free advertising for their line, and as for the notice attracting any evil characters, they pooh-poohed that idea. The days of Teach and Captain Kidd were over, they reminded me, and in the event that the new men should prove mutinous, they relied upon the superior numbers of the faithful crew."

The mate turned back to his breakfast with a shrug.

"We might be able to outnumber them, sir," he conceded, "but that isn't proof that our own men wouldn't be corrupted. Where are you going to stow the chest?"

"It's down in the lower hold now," said the Captain, "and I've half a mind to leave it there. It's mighty good ballast."

The mate raised a pair of startled eyes, while his jaws worked as steadily as those of a ruminating cow.

"What about the insurance company?" he demanded. "Wouldn't they kick?"

"Oh," laughed his superior officer, "I think I can fix it up with them." He pushed back his plate and arose. "But I'm going aboard the *Salida* now. I promised Captain Walker to come and see him before we sailed."

The mate nodded and accompanied his officer to the deck.

Some distance to the south of them lay the *Salida*, a topsail schooner of three hundred tons. She belonged to the same company as the *Equator*, and though the smallest boat in the line, was by far the most seaworthy. At present she was loaded with a general cargo for Sydney, for which port she was scheduled to sail on the following Thursday.

"I'll be back by twelve, Mr. Kerr," said the Captain, as he stepped over the side. "If any men show up in the meantime, send 'em forward. Never mind what they look like. We sail to-day at one, and we've got to take whatever the office sends us."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the mate grimly.

The Captain had not been gone an hour before the mate caught sight of a group of hard-looking men approaching along the wharf. That they were heading for the *Equator* he made no doubt, judging from the curious, lingering glances with which they viewed her; but he stubbornly fought back this belief till they had set foot upon the gang-plank. There were six of them, all told, and there was not one of them who did not look as if he had been dragged from a dive of the vilest.

With a click of his teeth the mate went forward and intercepted them at the waist. They paid no heed to him at first, giving all their attention to the ship.

"Some class, hey?" remarked one, taking in the spick-and-span condition of the top-hamper.

"An' plenty o' hard work," growled another. "I'll bet they drive a man like —— aboard here. Take a look at that deck."

Various other comments, interlarded with oaths, were offered, to all of which the mate paid but a stony attention. At length they took notice of him.

"Say, ducky, where's de old man?" growled a loutish young fellow, stepping insolently forward.

"*Sir*, when you speak to me!" the mate snapped, sizing him up in the flash of an eye.

"Oh, you're bucko," the fellow grinned. "Well, we're shipped—McWilliams an' Thompson. Dunnage be aboard dis aft. Say, where's de old man?"

Without a word the mate stepped forward and caught him by the collar of his coat. Two seconds later he was sprawling his length upon the deck.

"Now, then, get forrard, the lot o' you!" the officer cried, reaching quickly for a belaying-pin. "If it's trouble you're after, you'll get it, good and plenty."

A vengeful murmur ran around the group; one or two put a hand to their sheath-knives; but grudgingly they shrunk a few paces forward.

The one who had been thrown came up like a cat, eyes flashing, cheeks glowing scarlet.

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"Say, ducky, don't you do dat ag'in!" he warned. "D'you know who I am? I'm Jimmy Kitchen, an' I ain't fergot how to fight yet."

"Glad to meet you, Jimmy," the mate smiled. "Just got out, didn't you? I've been reading about you. How'd you come to ship?"

For a moment the boy glowered at him, uncertain as to how the remark should be taken.

"We was broke, dat's all," piped up a man in the rear.

The mate eyed Kitchen through narrowed lids. "I see. They don't pay wages where you came from. Nothing else?"

"Huh?" said the boy. "I don't git yuh. Aw, nix on dat kiddin'. Say, we want ten bones advance. Dey wouldn't give us any up to de office."

The mate dropped his air of banter and came grimly forward.

"Look here, Kitchen," he said shortly, "you're mistaken in your man. When I demand respect, I get it. Try any more of your insolence and I'll climb your frame. If you want your advance money, speak to the Captain, though I don't doubt it's been paid already. Now, I'll give you three to get forrard. Are you going?"

The lad looked at him for a moment, grinned insolently and swung on his heel with a mocking, "Yes, *sir*."

AT TWELVE o'clock, when Captain Older returned, bringing with him a new second officer, the mate acquainted him with the proceedings. The skipper was not surprised; he had feared all along that the new men would prove to be of this type. Moreover, he had called at the shipping-office and learned of their arrival.

"They were kicking for advance money, sir," said the mate. "Claimed they didn't get any at the office."

"That's a lie," returned the Captain quietly. "They were paid ten dollars apiece. They spent it before they came aboard."

"In that case," was the reply, "they'll soon be showing the effects of it. I'll bet they're tanking up now."

The Captain nodded.

"We'd better get under way while they're sober," he advised. "You two go forward and see things clear. I've straightened out the insurance, and the pilot'll be aboard in half an hour."

"Ay, ay, sir," they both answered, and they went forward to lick the old crew into shape and intimidate the new.

An hour later, with a pilot in charge, the *Equator* was bucking her way through the Golden Gate into the long, clean sweep of the Pacific. The new hands, though not very steady upon their legs, had managed to crawl up on deck and help get the vessel under way. Immediately after this was accomplished they had gone below again.

Aware of the wisdom of enforcing discipline from the first, the mate went forward, as soon as they dropped the pilot, with the intention of putting them to work at odd jobs about the deck. One tall, ape-like creature he collared, just as the fellow was slinking below.

"Here, come out o' that, Nailer," he commanded. "I know you—ex-pilot, broken for boozing. You belong at the wheel."

He was on the point of descending the forecastle ladder, when he was arrested by sounds of revelry.

"Cripes," said Kitchen, "hurry up with that bottle. I'm so dry I could spit cotton."

The mate went aft immediately and reported the incident to his skipper. Captain Older frowned, pinched his chin and fell to pacing the quarter.

"That's bad," he muttered, "but it can't be helped. Rather have them drunk and out of the way than on deck and a nuisance."

To the mate this was but small satisfaction. It was not in his code of discipline to extend privileges to any crew.

"Will you please tell me, sir," he broke out impulsively, "why you shipped them at all? They don't do any work; they've done nothing but lie in their bunks and swill booze ever since they came aboard. You won't let me go forrard an' lick 'em into shape, and as it is they're only a bad example to the rest."

The Captain clenched his hands tightly. "No," he said hastily, "I can't have you interfere with them. That would only hasten the crisis. We must wait a little longer; I'll tell you when. In the meantime, get along with them the best way you can. It won't last forever."

The mate stared after his retreating form with a look of mingled surprise and indignation.

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"No," he muttered grimly, "it won't last forever. But if it's all the same to you, I'll carry a gun."

The liquor upon which the crew had been so assiduously regaling themselves gave out in time, and on the fourth day they came staggering to the deck, red-eyed, emaciated and sour-looking generally. The mate noted their appearance with satisfaction. It was through no will of his that they had spent four days in idleness, and he meant, then and there, to put an end to it. As soon as he caught sight of them he slipped a gun into his pocket and went forward.

But if he had been expecting trouble he was disappointed. The old hands themselves could not have behaved with more respect and obedience. Though many of the men, through sea-sickness and debauchery, were scarcely able to stand, they set cheerfully to work at the disagreeable tasks he assigned them. Even Kitchen, whom he distrusted most, caught up pot and tar-brush and went at his job of slushing down with the greatest good-will in the world.

The mate was not to be deceived by appearances, however. He knew that in the attitude of these men lurked a deeper meaning than he was supposed to see, and immediately he set to work at getting the riddle solved. He had been standing at the foot of the foremast, superintending the splicing of a raveled stay, when his attention was attracted by guarded whispers from above. The men were the young fellow, Kitchen, and Swenson, one of the honest hands.

"Vell," said the Swede, "ay tank dey stow it in da lower hold. Ay jus' hear steward talk to Heldstrom."

"Uh-huh," returned Kitchen softly, "an' a handy place tuh have it. Half a million simoleons, Swenson! Dat's a —— of a lot uh money."

"Yess," said Swenson.

The mate listened a moment longer, but the only sound that caught his ear was the rythmic slop of the tar-brush. He wheeled about then, and without a betraying sign walked off.

THROUGH his head ran a volley of conjectures. So the new hands had already made friends with the old! This, in itself, was bad enough, for it meant that the faithful crew had taken the initial step to corruption, but worse still was the fact that the two parties were already exhibiting interest in the gold. It was plain enough now why Kitchen and his gang had created no disturbance. They were giving their attention to a better cause; making stronger their friendship with the old crew, till the time should come to strike.

Captain Older was in his cabin, looking over a chart, when the mate found him and acquainted him with the incident. He put down the chart and raised his head quickly.

"Kitchen?" he demanded. "Hobnobbing with the honest hands? Oh, well, I suppose he's got to talk to somebody. Just a little friendly gossip."

"That may be, sir," returned the mate with spirit, "but they were talking about the gold."

The Captain smiled at his earnestness.

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised. They naturally would. It isn't every ship that clears out of port with half a million dollars."

The mate stared at him.

"So you think it don't amount to anything?"

Captain Older shook his head.

"All right, sir," said the mate, "I do. I've been bucko aboard a hell-ship before, and can read the signs. You'd better keep an eye on the new second officer. He's a bit too friendly with the men."

He ignored the quiet smile on the face of his superior officer and stalked morosely into his stateroom.

THREE days later, when he came on deck to take the morning watch, he found the ship frothing along under a topsail breeze, just fifty miles north of the line. The day was bright and cloudless, the sea bluer than he ever remembered to have seen it. So used had he become to the general tranquility of the ship that he took no notice of the cluster of men in the waist. He had just turned about to take a look into the binnacle, when he was arrested by a hail from forward.

"All right, Mr. Kerr, put up dem grub-hooks!"

The mate wheeled about, astonished, to find himself confronted by Kitchen and a six-shooter.

There was no time for rallying. He had been taken unawares and at unequal odds, for he noticed that Kitchen was not the only one who held a revolver. The second mate and half a dozen others were similarly

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armed. Mechanically he brought his hands upward.

"Now, you keep yer mout shut!" the young mutineer growled, advancing upon him with the leveled weapon. "If you sing out, it'll be duh last uh yuh. Swenson, fetch a hunk uh string."

The mate submitted in silence to the indignity of being disarmed. He was then dragged over to the mizzen chains and bound there.

Kitchen stepped up beside the cabin skylight and with the butt of his revolver rapped sharply upon the deck. This was the signal for the Captain to appear. Like a flash the mate conceived the possibility of warning his skipper. Kitchen must have perceived his intention, for he threw him a swift glance over his shoulder.

"Keep an eye on dat guy, Mr. Tooker," he commanded.

At that instant came the sound of someone ascending the stairs. Kitchen cocked his revolver and crouched beside the companion-way. He did not know that the Captain was unarmed, and he was taking no chances. Then the skipper's iron-gray head rose above the combing.

"Han's up, Cap'n Older!" snapped Kitchen.

The skipper halted, with one hand upon the combing. At first he could not place the direction of the cry, nor its meaning. Then his startled eyes took in the group of armed men, the form of his mate, bound hand and foot to the mizzen rigging. A deadly pallor crossed his face; he turned, and with a startled exclamation essayed to dash below.

"No, you don't!"

Before he had taken the first step Kitchen's long, sinewy arm shot out and fastened itself about his collar. The next thing he knew, the chill barrel of a revolver was pressing against his temple.

"I'd oughta plug you fer dat!" the boy cried hotly. He hauled the Captain unceremoniously to the deck. "Here, Swenson, 'nother job fer yuh."

He gave his prisoner in charge of the Swede, pocketed his gun and took his stand in the center of the quarter-deck.

"Now, look here, you two fellahs," he began, "we're goin' tuh keep you bound till we've searched duh cabins. After we've got all duh guns we'll let yuh go. You kin have free run uh duh ship an' no work, if yuh'll keep quiet. But start any roughhouse, an' we'll drill yuh. We don't want no bloodshed in dis game, but we're out after dat coin, an' duh sooner you see t'ings dat way, duh better. We're all mixed up in it, so yuh needn't look fer any help from any of us. Dat's all."

He nodded to his companions, swung on his heel and started for the cabin. They followed him in single file.

In the meantime Swenson had trussed up the skipper and tied him beside the mate. The moment he was gone the Captain turned upon his chief officer.

"Good God!" he cried hoarsely. "A mutiny! Twenty-two years with a clean slate, and now—*this!*"

The mate grunted and continued to gaze stoically seaward. Aside from any wrath he might feel on account of his official position, he was not very greatly in sympathy with his skipper. Had not the latter been wilfully blind he might have observed the general situation and been prepared.

"I'd have trusted every one of them with my life!" the Captain groaned. "The dirty, cowardly traitors!"

He was very near crying, if a strong man ever indulges in such a weakness, and the mate flashed him a quick glance of sympathy.

"You didn't reckon with that gang of hell-hounds, sir," he returned bitterly. "They'd corrupt an angel. However, we've got our lives yet, which is something to be thankful for. Our luck may change."

The sound of feet upon the companion-stairs put an end to the conversation, and when Kitchen came on deck he found only the two gazing disinterestedly seaward.

"All right, you fellahs," he growled sullenly, "you're free to go now. We've located all duh gats, an' we'll stow duh big guns forrard. If yuh'll take my advice, yuh won't try any funny stunts. We ain't takin' no chances."

He stepped aside and motioned for two men to come up and release the officers. The moment the Captain was freed he approached the young mutineer and looked him squarely in the eye.

"All right for *you*, Mr. Kitchen," he said tensely. "You're playing a mighty high hand just now, but it won't last very long. You'll never live to enjoy that money."

Kitchen spread out his legs, folded his arms and stared after the retreating officer

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with an expression of the most exaggerated surprise.

"Aw, Cap'n," he returned soberly, "quit yer kiddin'."

Being gifted with a plentiful supply of stoicism, the mate put an indifferent front on the affair and, while his skipper went below to rave and weep by turns, he lighted his pipe and took a seat upon the lee rail, to hear and observe all that went on about him.

NOW that he had disclosed his real intentions, Kitchen lost no time in putting them into execution. The ship was thrown into the wind, the sails lowered, and then the crew piled pell-mell into the hold to have a look at the chest.

Acting upon a foolhardy impulse, for which he could in no way account, the mate went with them. The chest lay in the lower hold, directly beneath the main hatch, just as the tackle had left it. It was made of steel, three feet square by about five feet long. The sling in which it had been lowered was still in position and the only adjustment necessary for raising it again was the fitting of a suitable tackle.

"Fine," declared Kitchen approvingly, "fine and dandy! We'll have her out uh here by to-morruh. Half a dozen uh you fellahs run on deck an' git dem hatches off. A couple uh more rig up a block an' tackle. Lively, now!"

They resented his tone of authority, but they flew to obey his orders. An unnatural excitement had transformed the lot of them. In place of their former aggressive attitude they were as nervous and divided as a flock of sheep. In this state, the mate reasoned shrewdly, a few determined men could easily get them under control. But he was in no position to attempt it.

At the end of half an hour, in spite of the great confusion, the men had taken off the hatches, rigged a tackle across the main-top and brought the end of it forward to the capstan. Then they took up the slack to the tune of "Santa Anna." But here they ran into difficulties. The moment they caught the strain on the single strand the rope cracked, parted, and the chest settled back with a jar that shook the ship from truck to keelson.

Kitchen swore and ordered the men to lay off. Two or three of them were sent to search the vessel for a cable of steel. To the mate's sour suggestion that there was none on board, they returned a smile of derision. This job took them the greater part of the forenoon, and in the meantime, having grown thirsty through the heat of the sun and their previous efforts, the rest of the crew went into the lazarette and broached a cask of Burgundy. Deprived thus of something to occupy his attention, the mate went in search of his skipper.

He found him in the after cabin, his head upon his arms. At first he thought the Captain had given way to collapse, but when he raised his head he saw that it was seamed with the stress of a gigantic mental struggle.

"I wouldn't take it so hard, sir," he said bluntly. "It's —— on you, I know, but it's a little too late to worry now."

Captain Older measured him with an implacable stare.

"Worry?" he repeated. "You don't know what it means to me. My reputation is gone forever. Twenty-two years in the service and never lost a ship. Good God!"

He groaned and let his head fall helplessly back upon his arms.

The mate stared at him for a moment, frowned and poured out a stiff tumbler of brandy.

"Here," he said shortly, "brace up. Don't forget you're still commander of this ship. To the dickens with your reputation! You've got other things to worry about now. There's half a million dollars in the hold that you're responsible for."

Captain Older looked up with a bitter smile.

"Gold?" he repeated. "I'm not bothering about the gold. Let them have it, if they want it."

Mechanically, his head dropped back to its former position.

The mate was about to reply when from the direction of the lazarette came the sound of drunken voices breaking into ribald song. Some one caught up a bottle and used it to beat time to the music; another broke into a shuffle. The din began to grow terrific.

At that moment there came an oath from the deck, the sound of some one descending the stairs, and then the voice of Kitchen in the passage.

"Here, you swine," he yelled, "clear out uh dat! Duh last man on deck settles wit' me!"

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The immediate cessation of the uproar and the simultaneous rush for the companion-stairs told that Kitchen's authority was a thing to conjure with.

When the last man had cleared the passage-way, with the irate Kitchen close behind him, the mate betook himself to the deck in a quiet and dignified manner. Ostensibly he had come to note the position of the ship; in reality, for the purpose of spying upon the mutineers. In regard to the work that was going on in the waist, Kitchen had despaired of finding a cable in the hold and had made use of one of the wire back-stays. When the men wound up the capstan this time there was plenty of protest from the misused cable, but no breakage, and the heavy steel chest rose steadily, inch by inch, from the lower hold.

"All right, there, hold her—*ho-old* her!" yelled Kitchen, standing at the edge of the hatchway.

The half-drunken crew rested on their bars, breathing heavily while one essayed to slip the dog into place with his foot. Had he left the mechanism entirely alone it would have caught automatically and all would have gone well, but the heel of his boot struck the projecting lever, tore it out of the catch, and with a roar the released capstan spun backward. The men, who had been resting on the bars were knocked flat upon the deck; the chest shot downward and struck the vessel's bottom, struck it with a rending, splintering crash that sent every man flat upon his face. The main-topgallant mast snapped off short; the ship plunged heavily and listed to port.

Kitchen was the first man upon his feet.

"By ——!" he cried. "By ——!"

He crawled to the edge of the hatchway and peered below. But the gloom of those cavernous depths rendered things invisible.

"Who did dat?" he screamed, jumping up and brandishing his fist in the direction of the prostrate seamen. "Who did dat? By ——, if dat chest went t'rough, I'll kill him—I'll kill him!"

He turned suddenly and darted for the companion-stairs. The mate, whose chief grievance was a bleeding nose, picked himself up and started after him, noting, as he sped by, that the Captain was just coming on deck, rather pale about the gills, but apparently master of the situation.

IN A FEW moments the racing couple had reached the scene of destruction. Where they had been expecting chaos, they found comparative order. The chest had struck the main deck in its descent and its fall had been somewhat broken. It was lying beside the keelson, imbedded in the very ceiling, one corner projecting downward through the outer planking. So sharply had the hole been cut, however, that there was but little leakage. When the mate and Kitchen came upon the scene the water had not yet reached to the flooring.

"Lordy," breathed the mate, wiping away the sweat with a gnarled and horny forefinger. "I thought it'd gone clean through her."

"So'd I," said Kitchen.

He lit a match and the two made a hurried note of the damage.

"Hm-m," grunted the chief officer, "I've seen worse. Take a little oakum an' work it around the sides o' the chest and you'll get her under control, all right."

"Dat an' duh pumps'll do fer her," acquiesced Kitchen. He blew out the match and they started back. "But wait'll I git my hooks on dat guy dat ditched her. I'll kill him!"

But the man was already dead. When they got to the deck they found him stretched out beneath the bulwarks. He had been stooping down when the capstan reversed and one of the heavy metal bars had taken him squarely across the forehead. Kitchen turned away in disgust.

"Tie a weight to his feet an' t'row him overboard," he growled. "We ain't got no time for burial. Duh rest uh youse guys go fer dem pumps. Jump, now!"

He himself took tools and a wad of oakum and started below to repair the leak.

Through all this excitement Captain Older had remained unmoved. He was standing beside the lee rail when the mate returned and to his unspoken question the officer replied with a nod.

"No danger at all, sir," he declared, "if they know how to take care of it. Chest's wedged itself right through the planking. With good, calm weather they could keep her afloat for a week."

The Captain nodded and glanced aloft at the crippled mainmast.

"But she's doomed," he breathed heavily. "she'll never see port again. The first I

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ever lost—and the last. —— their dirty souls!"

The mate shuffled uneasily.

"The best way to look at that, sir, is to forget all about it," he advised. "We've got still greater troubles to think about now. If this ship goes down, I, for one, don't intend to go down with her. We'll have to find some way of giving 'em the slip."

"Yes," replied the Captain quickly, "you're right. If we ever intend to have the scoundrels punished we must get to port ourselves. Lord knows what lying yarns they might tell." He became imbued with a sudden optimistic energy. "All I want to live for now," he declared tensely, "is to see those traitors hung! They've played —— with my reputation and they're going to suffer for it!"

The rhythmic clanking of the pumps put an end to the conversation, and while the Captain started for his cabin, aglow with vengeful purposes, the mate went forward to the main hatch, caught the swaying tackle and slid down to the lower hold to see how matters stood with Kitchen.

The lad was at work in the glow of a kerosene lantern, the perspiration oozing out upon his arms and forehead.

"Greetings," said the mate, as he dropped lightly to the deck. "Making any headway?"

Kitchen grunted assent, while he worked steadily on with the mallet and chisel.

"I guess this'll about call your bluff, eh?" pursued the officer grimly.

Kitchen paused, the mallet in mid-air, to scowl wonderingly up at him.

"W'at was dat you said?" he demanded.

"I say, you'll stand no chance of getting that gold now," the mate explained. "The minute you try to hoist that chest the water'll run in and drown you out like rats in a trap. Better surrender your guns now, and turn to."

For a moment the boy gaped at him. Then he folded his arms and broke into derisive laughter.

"Mister Kerr," said he, "straight goods now, d'you t'ink I'm as big a fool as dat? Don't you t'ink I got any brains a-*tall?* I'd look cute, wouldn't I, runnin' up to de old man an' turnin' over me gat? Nix; I ain't crazy. Uf you wanna see how it's done, jist wait an' watch."

He returned to his work with a chuckle of satisfaction.

"Why, what do you mean to do?" demanded the mate.

"Well," said the boy, "duh lid uh dis chest is layin' on top, ain't it? W'at's duh matter wit' drillin' it off?"

For an instant the mate experienced a pang of chagrin. Then he stepped up to the chest and made a rapid estimate of its impregnability.

"Go ahead," he returned cheerfully, "and when you've got that lid drilled through, let me know. It's tool-proof, or I'm an ignoramus."

He made his way to the deck in high spirits, not a whit perturbed by Kitchen's sarcastic smile of confidence.

As he strolled along the upper passage he caught again the sounds of revelry from the lazarette. The men were not so boisterous as before, but from the continuous hum of voices he knew that they numbered every idle hand on board. When he reached the upper deck this belief was substantiated. Save for Captain Older, it was deserted.

"Mr. Kerr," cried the skipper, thrusting a pair of binoculars into his hands and pointing over the stern, "take a look at that craft and tell me what you make of her."

The mate had the glasses in position before his skipper finished speaking.

"Schooner," he grunted. "Heading this way. Don't know as I could name her."

"What matter?" returned the Captain eagerly. "She's a Godsend. If only we can keep her a secret from the mutineers."

The mate returned the glasses with a frown.

"I wouldn't bank too much on her," he cautioned. "She might belong to them. Maybe she's a consort, sent out to get the gold."

For an instant the Captain's face lengthened. He adjusted the glasses and trained them again upon the white speck astern.

"No," he declared, "she's a trader. I'm sure I've seen her before; I'd stake my life on it."

The heavy tramp of feet on the companion-stairs told that the men below had finished their orgy and were coming on deck. At this juncture the mate and skipper quietly separated.

ALL that night the ship remained hove to, and, watch by watch, the men kept working the pumps. Since the weather held fair and the ship lay still and Kitchen had caulked the leak well, they

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had no difficulty in keeping the water under. As soon as morning dawned, three of them went below to drill through the lid of the chest. Kitchen was in a sportive mood and he invited the mate along to see how it was done. He had drilled through harder stuff than that, he assured him.

But Kitchen was mistaken. Beyond cutting through the black enamel the case-hardened bits made no impression upon the stubborn metal. The mate finally tired of watching and taunting the mystified Kitchen, and made his way to the upper deck. As on the previous day, every man of the crew but those who were at the pumps was in the lazarette, making merry. With the grim hope that they would eventually drink themselves to death, the mate ignored them.

Captain Older was on the quarter-deck when the mate appeared and he was sweeping the horizon anxiously with the binoculars.

"Gone," he cried bitterly, without waiting for the other's question. "She passed without ever seeing us."

The mate gave impolite vent to his feelings.

"That settles it," he said grimly. "We help ourselves. If we don't, we get it in the neck. I hate to see them get all that gold, darn their stinking souls, but there's no help for it! I move we provision the quarter-boat right away. It'd be safe from observation, and we might never have another opportunity."

The Captain gave his assent, and the chief officer set off in the direction of the pantry. For over half an hour the two worked on uninterrupted, and at the end of that time they had stored aboard the boat enough food and water to last them for a fortnight. By the end of that time, if the wind blew at all, they hoped to have reached far enough north to be in the track of the San Francisco Australian trade.

At noon Kitchen and his two companions came up from the lower hold, over-worked, over-heated and not in the best of tempers. The mate took note of their condition with satisfaction.

"Fine, Kitchen!" he declared enthusiastically. "Hardest you've worked since you've been aboard. How goes it? Through yet?"

"T'rough?" returned the boy sourly. "No, not yet. But we will be dis aft. I'm goin' tuh build a fire on dat —— lid an' cook duh temper out. I'll call yuh when we're t'rough!"

"Do," said the mate.

But he waited all afternoon and no word came from Kitchen. At intervals came the sound of metal striking against metal and an ensuing volley of curses, and he surmised that Kitchen, in the vernacular of his ilk, had "flown off the handle."

At four o'clock the boy returned to the deck, grimy, sweaty, the clothes burned half off of him, and met the mate's confident smile with one of goaded recklessness.

"Laugh," he advised him shortly, "bust yerself. Yuh won't have a chanct tuh laugh long. I'll be t'rough dat lid by nightfall."

"What are you going to do now?" queried the mate.

"Soup," returned the boy succinctly. "I k'n blow off duh side uh duh Flatiron Building wit' dat."

The mate's face paled. "Nitro-glycerine!" he gasped. "You wouldn't dare! Why, you'd tear out chest and all! Besides, we haven't got an ounce of the stuff on board."

Kitchen regarded him with a sneering smile.

"Maybe youse ain't," he returned contemptuously, "but we have. We've got all duh dope dat goes to make it, an' I k'n have a bag of it ready in half an hour."

The mate let out a startled oath. "You'll blow the whole blamed ship up, that's what you'll do," he declared bluntly. "You'd better let the stuff alone now and turn to."

"Fergit it!" said the lad sharply. "I'll raise dat lid so darned quick you won't know what happened. Anyway, it ain't yer butt-in."

IT TOOK Kitchen a good deal longer than he expected to concoct his devilish explosive. The sun had gone down and night was already beginning to fall when he took the mixture below. The mate saw him well on his way, then hurried to the cabin and called softly to Captain Older.

"Be ready any minute, sir," he advised. "We can leave as soon as it gets a little darker. There isn't a soul on deck but the watchman, and he's dead to the world with a quart or more inside of him. The rest of the crew are divided between the pumps, the lazarette and the lower hold."

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"Very well," returned the Skipper. "I'll make the last entry in the log. You go on deck and keep watch. As soon as you think it dark enough, rap on the deck."

The mate nodded and ascended to his post. He had not long to wait. Night falls quickly in the tropics, and this one bade fair to be exceptionally dark. In response to his guarded signal the Captain appeared with log-book, sextant and chronometer.

"I've greased the falls, sir," whispered the mate, "so we sha'n't make a great deal of noise. Anyway, that bunch of raving hoodlums below would never hear us."

While he was talking the two were working, and ten seconds later the port quarter-boat swung out from the davits, descended slowly and struck the water with hardly a splash. Almost as silently the two men piled into her. Owing to the prevailing blackness, it was hard to distinguish things and they made appreciable noise before they found the oars and fitted them into the row-locks. They negotiated the undertaking in safety, however, and a few minutes later were well away from the ship and pulling strongly.

For half an hour they kept on in the blackness, rising and falling with every crest and hollow, and the twinkling lights of the *Equator* grew farther and farther astern. They did not indulge in conversation. The nature of the undertaking and the perils it portended precluded that. Captain Older was unusually taciturn. While on other occasions he was wont to give free rein to his feelings, now he brooded over them in silence.

Suddenly, as they rose on a liquid summit, they were startled by a spectacle astern. From the open hatchway of the *Equator* and from every vent and porthole burst a cloud of heavy smoke, swelling, billow-like, against the sky. Then the ship seemed literally to go to pieces. She parted in the middle, the bow falling one way, the stern another, and the mainmast rose bodily into the air! The next instant those in the boat were overtaken by a gigantic, thunderous vibration.

Both were pitched incontinently backward. For a moment, too, so racking was the effect of the explosion, they lay there stunned, unable to move a muscle! The mate was the first to regain consciousness. He caught the gunwale with shaking hands and brought himself to a sitting posture. There was nothing left of the *Equator*. She had been practically torn to pieces, and the fragments of her that still floated were mercifully hidden by the darkness.

"Good Lord!" cried the mate. "Good Lord!"

The Captain drew himself back upon his thwart and for a moment gazed tragically astern.

"Gone!" he whispered hoarsely. "My last command!"

"I knew they'd do it, I knew it!" the mate burst out impulsively, now that words had come to him. "The blasted, blooming idiots, they might have known better than to monkey with nitro-glycerine. Thank God, we weren't aboard!"

Captain Older retained his sphinx-like attitude.

"They got it, the dirty traitors, they got it good and hard!" he cried. "It's the will of a just providence."

The mate caught up his oars and mechanically adjusted them in the rowlocks. "Serves 'em right," he ground out savagely. "I knew that gold'd be the death of 'em. It's always that way. But it's too darned bad we lost it."

Captain Older did not reply, and the two pulled ahead in silence. Through the reaction of the event they had been thrown into a fearful meditation, and their immediate surroundings were not such as to promote conversation.

All that night, at intervals of an hour each, they pulled northward. Night was the time when they must row, for as soon as the sun rose, each exertion would demand an excessive amount of water; and they knew they must husband it most judiciously. At intervals they lighted a match and observed the time by their watches. Shortly after midnight, while he was resting, the Captain fell asleep. The mate did not arouse him. The man must be suffering the tortures of the damned and it would be cruel not to give him a respite. Then, in the gray of early morning, the mate, too, dropped off, even while his arms were mechanically moving the oars.

Awakening, his first sense of consciousness was a turbulent, rushing sound and the intuitive comprehension of the nearness of some great, tangible object. He awoke with a start, his heart leaping into his throat, and opened his eyes.

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NOT a hundred feet to windward lay a ship. She was just in the act of heaving to. Men were rushing and shouting about her decks, and the near rail was lined with faces—frank, kindly faces that stared curiously down at him.

"Ye all right, down there?" bawled a short, red-headed man from the quarter.

The mate came to himself with a start.

"Aye, all right, sir," he cried cheerily. He sprang aft and shook the Captain by the shoulder. "Here, sir, wake up and see what's happened."

Waiting only till the skipper began to rouse himself, he sprang forward, grasped the painter and tossed it up to the group along the rail. They caught it, and, half a dozen tailing on, soon drew the light craft alongside.

"Great Scott!" cried the Captain, appraising the schooner in a single, fleeting glance, "the *Salida!*"

Without losing any time they caught the rope that was flung to them and made their way rapidly to the deck. The short, red-headed man met them as they came over the side.

"Captain Older!" he gasped. "Well, of all that's holy! How'd you git here? Where's your crew? Where's the *Equator?*"

Captain Older laid a trembling hand upon his shoulder.

"Just wait till I get my bearings, Walker," he pleaded. "A good, stiff tumbler of grog would help me."

The other nodded and led the way to his cabin. He invited the two men to the table, poured out a round of drinks, and then leaned forward expectantly.

"In the first place," began Captain Older, "I believe we sighted your vessel around here yesterday."

Captain Walker nodded.

"Got a fire in the bows and we had to lay to and fight it," he said. "Took us nearly thirty hours and we had to turn over every box and bundle in the hold."

"I thought it was the *Salida*," returned Captain Older.

He finished his glass and took up his narrative. In a few words he acquainted his friend with the details, from the moment they left San Francisco till the time they were rescued.

Captain Walker listened, open-mouthed, his glass in mid-air.

"So the ad. fetched them after all," he cried. "You were right, Captain Older, and I congratulate you. But you made one mistake. You didn't figure on the treachery among the honest hands."

Captain Older brought his fist sharply down upon the table.

"Yes," he assented grimly, "that's where my plans miscarried. I'd have trusted them with my life, and they turned against me. However, they've paid the penalty, and since the ship and cargo were heavily insured I don't think my owners will mind it much. I am the one who will suffer. My reputation is gone forever. I'll never go to sea again."

He put down his glass and buried his chin in his hands.

The mate, who had been an attentive, if somewhat irritable, listener, could contain himself no longer.

"But the gold, Captain," he burst out impulsively. "Don't you count that? There's half a million of it gone to the bottom!"

Captain Older raised his head with a start.

"Gold?" he repeated.

He glanced quickly across at Captain Walker. The faces of both relaxed into a smile.

"Oh," he explained, "I meant to tell you, Mr. Kerr. There wasn't any gold aboard the *Equator*. That chest was filled with lead. It was the *Salida* that got the shipment. The notice in the paper was merely a hoax, designed by me to draw all the evil characters aboard the *Equator*. Then, after the *Equator* had sailed, the *Salida* could take out her consignment in safety. My only mistake was that I thought the old hands could be trusted."

For fully a minute the mate gaped at him. It took that long for the matter to sink into his brain. Then he arose and held out his hand.

"Excuse me, Captain Older," he pleaded. "I might have known you weren't as big a fool as that. They'll be on me when we reach Sydney!"

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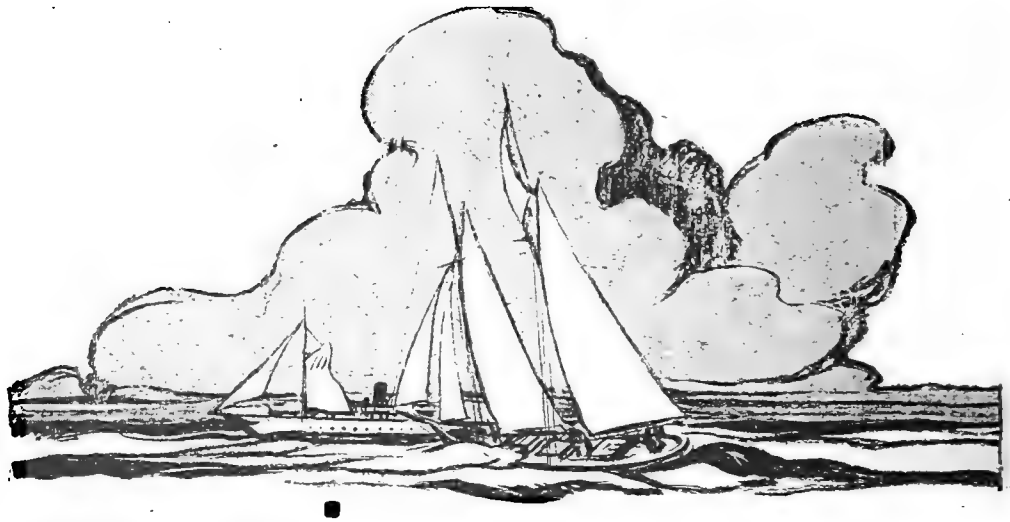

Forbidden Treasure

by Beatrix Demarest Lloyd & Esher Martin

CHAPTER XLVI

GOLD AND JEWELS

THE days following were filled with an excitement the like of which they had never dreamed. All day long they gleaned in the harvest field of the Vatna, searching in different directions, or working together to dislodge some frozen bit of plunder. Some of the pieces were shapeless masses of bullion, encrusted with precious and semi-precious stones; others still maintained the symmetry of their original form.

There were great basin-like dishes of gold, chased and pierced and inlaid, with ewers to match them, whose great handles were underset with ivory. There were crosses to be worn, and crosses to be set upon altars, and both kinds were ablaze with scarlet rubies and the deep ultramarine of the sapphires. Clasps for sacred books they found jumbled together in a rich mass, and rosaries whose separate pearls were of far greater value than the pinchbeck penitence which had in dead ages been sworn upon them.

There were golden drinking goblets heavy with gems and fit only for the nectar of Jupiter Ammon, deep, round, generous cups that fifty emeralds could barely circle. Reliquaries, studded with lustrous jewels, came out of the icy depths of the glacier reluctantly, but the sunlight that struck upon their sides seemed glad. Forty tassels of kneeling-cushions, Nora collected, woven of fine gold wire, each thread finished with a single stone. They tinkled musically as she shook them to and fro. Censers, battered some of them and some perfect, dragged their chains after them like long imprisoned malefactors at last released from jail, and the weight of the riches which they bore was greater than Nora could hold in her two hands.

But, woman-like, her heart quickened most toward the personal ornaments of those poor murdered holy men, as they came to light, the turquoise buckles for shoes, the thick pompous chains of studded gold from which their crosses hung, their gorgeous rings so finely wrought, so richly set with amethyst and emerald, the wide clasps for the mantles that would have graced the coronation of an emperor.

"And oh, how strange they look, don't they?" she said half awed and half amazed. "There, lying in this wilderness, we can leave them for years and never fear that thieves will break in and steal."

She stood beside Stuart, looking down

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upon their first day's haul, a scattered pile of gold and jewels that glowed and glittered in the faint sunlight. Fong, who had not known their purpose in blasting the glacier and who had come upon their first blazing find unprepared, had gone about all day with open mouth, whimpering strange hysterical Chinese, as he brought bit after bit to add to the pile. Not so much as one broken bit of chrysophrase had gone into his wide sleeves. The most minute fragment that he collected he laid upon the spread skirts of one of Stuart's coats.

"If anything ever deserved the name of a 'rum go,' this is it," replied Stuart. "All Tiffany emptied into a snow-bank could not be more amazing. Look at this old duffer's ring." He bent and picked up a circlet set with a carved, unflawed emerald as big as a postage-stamp. "Just look at that intaglio! A king could buy his way around the world with that."

She bent over looking at it.

"Oh, how exquisite the face is, isn't it?" she cried. "It—why, it is supposed to be a portrait of the Archangel, don't you think so? See the aureole about the head—those tiny little lines at the back? Oh, I would love to——" she caught herself up on the words, and added lamely, "I would love to see it through a magnifying glass."

"You shall," said Stuart quietly, dropping the ring into his pocket. "But what I have been thinking of is, what is the best way to get this stuff back to the yacht?

SHE considered the distance judicially. Fong's high piping voice broke in upon their speculations. "Packee grip?" he said politely.

"Now there's an idea," said Stuart, turning smilingly to her. "Suit-cases full of gold and jewels—there's a nice homely touch for you. If we only had a carpet-bag or so, my happiness would be complete. Fong, you and I will go back for the suit-cases. Miss Nora, will you come too?"

"Oh, I would rather stay and play with these heavenly things," she answered, "unless I can help you."

"You can't do that, of course. But you are quite safe, do you think, here alone?"

She laughed at him and flushed a little. His concern was very sweet to her.

"Why, unless Sigurda takes her decapitated head from under her arm and hurls it at me, or the Bull puts down its horns and charges me, I think you will find me still intact on your return."

He laughed with her and turned away. She watched him as he walked away toward the yacht, the funny little Chinaman hopping along to keep up with the unskirted stride of his master. And then she amused herself like a child with its toys, decking her hands and arms with the strange jewels, plaguing Humbug with amazing collars, and turning the larger pieces about and about in her hands.

In about half an hour Stuart and the boy returned, dragging behind them a confused jumble of traveling-bags. He had been at some pains, though she did not know it, to find such satchels as were unmarked by initials, for he had himself experienced some pang as he dragged out a suit-case marked "J. B., New York."

They crammed the awkward things as best they could into the bags, and dropped the smaller things into their pockets. The glut of their thirst for the treasure was no better displayed than when, as they were leaving the moraine, they came upon the upstanding corner of what appeared to be a triptych, and yet they went on without it, leaving it for to-morrow's work.

A weary trio they were, and they turned in early after a hot supper, but the next morning found them alert for the fascinating labor, and impatient to be off.

This time they went equipped with empty bags and an ample luncheon, and the labor of the previous day was repeated. Stuart, armed with a pick, laid bare new and bewildering treasure-trove, and their happy, excited voices echoed and rang as they called to one another. Another load as large as that of the previous day went back to the yacht with them, and yet they were far from satisfied that the mine was exhausted.

Stuart lay awake that night without a flicker of sleep in his eyelids. All that it meant to him, this new-found wealth, was surging through his brain with a brilliancy that would not be deadened. He saw himself rich—almost, perhaps, as rich as Nora Lee, rich enough certainly to be in a position without shame in confessing his love for her.

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CHAPTER XLVII

A PERILOUS TRIP

THE third day dawned even more brilliantly fair than the others. Stuart could feel the joy rising from his heart into his throat as the bubbles come up in a champagne glass. He was intoxicated with the excitement, dazzled by the hope of winning her at last when so he might, and thrilled with the delirium of success. Fong, speechless at last before the accumulation of a riches he had never heard approached in gilded fairy-stories, buckled into the work with a silent enthusiasm. If Stuart had lifted from the ice the stone that Buddha bore in his forehead, Fong would have had no further word to say.

All day the welcome sun burned down upon them at their labor, and again the miracles of rich beauty came from their thousand years' imprisonment. The amount of the stuff amazed him. It bid fair to be impossible to gather it up, he told himself, and never would he know when they had garnered the half of it. Charlemagne had indeed emptied the wealth of all his conquests into this expiatory treasure, wherein the abbot told his prayers over the pearls that Cleopatra would have killed Anthony to possess.

The very lavishness of the thing tormented him, for he was constantly assailed by more than a conviction that it was all a dream. When he let fall from one hand into another a diamond as heavy as a wren's egg, he asked himself soberly whether he waked or slept.

Their explorations of the upheaved glacier led them this day down into a great fissure which had opened in the explosion into an immense hole like an amphitheater, and here their greatest finds were made. The crowns and anklets of Adelgis himself perhaps were these they found, and a certain Popish finger-ring bore the insignia of Leo and and obscure Latin date of Christmas, in the year 800. More jewel-crusted golden reliquaries came to light and such bags of coins as they had never seen.

All day they burrowed about in this icy pit, half frozen in spite of the glorious sunlight, and finally as the time drew near for dinner they sent Fong above to hoist the trove up to the level plain. Bagful after bagful it went up—enough, as Stuart said, "to have made Solomon's Temple look like a five-and-ten-cent store"—until at last their hands were empty and he turned to help her to ascend.

The sun was low and the air was colder, yet as they came up from the refrigerated atmosphere where they had spent the day they were amazed to find how warm it was—amazed until Stuart gave his characteristic low whistle and jumped for the edge of the moraine.

"The ice!" he gasped.

NORA ran to his side and saw what he meant. Great starlike fractures in the ice had widened till the cakes plunged about in segregated masses. There was no longer a smooth ballroom floor stretched between them and their floating home, but a sheet of arctic water full of swimming rafts of ice pressed closely edge to edge.

"The sun and the wind!" he said. "And, fool that I am, not to have thought of it, a good strong beginning in our explosion of the other day!" He chewed his under lip a moment desperately.

"But how do we get back to the yacht?" she asked plaintively.

He was silent a moment longer and then, for answer, slipped out of his heavy fur coat.

"Here's the only way," he said grimly. "Stay just where you are—promise on your word of honor?"

She nodded, too apprehensive to make her vow more articulate.

But to her horror, he was scrambling down the moraine toward the water, cinching his belt as he went, and brushing back the unkempt hair that draggled in his eyes. An instant later she saw him leap from the shore, stocking-footed, upon the nearest cake of ice! The treacherous platform careened and plunged like a wild horse, and she cried aloud and hid her face, only to raise it again irresistibly to make sure he had not yet gone down.

He was farther from shore, his arms extended at either side as a balance, leaping perilously from one piece of ice to another, slipping, bending, waving and all but falling into the wicked waters that showed between the blocks.

Fong was screaming frankly, in a wild, unrestrained, elemental way that made her terror the more keen. Cry after cry burst

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from him as he stood, his long-nailed hands extended in a rigor, his narrow eyes staring with sheer horror.

She watched Stuart into the middle of the fiord, trembling, sobbing, swooning with fear for him. Then as he sprang across a black ribbon of water to another table of ice, she saw it swerve, she saw him slip forward, she saw the farther edge of the slab rise up like the end of a see-saw when a child has fallen off, and she fell forward upon her knees, hiding her face, and praying God as she had never prayed to him before.

It seemed to her as if the whole silent desert had begun to scream about her, as she knelt there, dazed, terrified, delirious, babbling her prayers and wringing her hands with which she vainly attempted to cover her staring eyes. In the intervals that came like the nightmare of an anesthetic, she saw him plunging onward in his suicidal course.

Then came the moment, unforgettable in her life's history, when she looked up with eyes all hot and dry in anguish and saw he was no longer there. A sob that seemed to tear the walls of her heart burst from her lips, and she felt the earth fall from beneath her. But Fong was shouting. The change in his voice was eloquent of her mistake. Inarticulate as ever, nevertheless triumph and relief rang in them, blatant as the howlings of an animal. She staggered to her feet and looked again. And saw him springing upward on the stair toward the deck!

So overwhelming was the relief that she sank down again upon the ice and burst into tears. No dry sobs shook her frail strength now, but great blinding torrents of tears poured over her cheeks, and left her eyes swollen and red.

When she sat up again at last, her nervous hysteria quite spent, she saw Fong at the edge of the moraine, carrying down the last bag, and Stuart in the launch making a clear way gingerly with a boathook through the besieging ice. With feminine forethought, she doubled her veil and tied it about her face before she went down, with Humbug trailing on three legs just behind her, to join them.

SHE said nothing and he said nothing of what he had just done. She could not speak of it.

"By Jingo, do you know that ring?" Stuart began before the boat was fairly nosed in to the shore, "I have just been thinking about that. Don't you remember, Carolus Magnus was crowned by Pope Leo the Third on Christmas in the year 800? And that must be the souvenir that was given away at that performance, by Leo to Charles with his best love! Why, that thing alone is worth more money than I ever saw in the paying-teller's cage! Upon my soul, you know, this thing is colossal! All the bags in, Fong? All right, get aboard. This is rather ticklish going, but we'll manage all right. No, I tell you what, young lady, the more I think of this affair, the harder I find it to draw my breath."

She looked at him and smiled and then was grave again. Had he no idea what he had done just now; had he no idea what she endured? He talked there as calmly of other things as if he had not ten minutes ago run a race with death, a race that might have left her desolate to die upon the Vatna.

"We thought this ice closing in was a hardship, part of the curse. Why, it was just an emphatic nudge to stay where we were—that we were on the right track! And now, when at last we have seen through the open gate and gone in and helped ourselves, doesn't the old ice get up and move away as much as to say 'Now that you understand the hint, I can go.'"

Still she did not speak to him. She watched him and Fong push the great blocks of ice clear of the bow, but her mind was weary with the strain through which she had passed and she could make no further effort.

"I tell you what I am crazy to do," he went on, his enthusiasm shining in his alert ruddy face. "I want to see this stuff all spread out. We will push the chairs back in the cabin and lay it on the floor, all that we got to-day and yesterday and the day before, and then we'll be able to pack it more compactly. You see, now that the ice is breaking up, we can start back to Reykjavik in the launch in a day or so, just as soon as the sea is comparatively clear. And we must have our Archangel in portable form, for we shall have to take him in here with us."

He laughed as he spoke, and she forced herself to smile again. But the smile did not deceive him and he paused as long as his exacting labor would permit to look at her more sharply.

"You are very tired," he said. "I have been abominably inconsiderate to keep you

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so on the go these first four days of your getting about at all. Why didn't you call a halt? I didn't mean to be a brute, upon my soul!"

"Really," she said, "I am not very tired."

"Not too tired to sit on the floor with me and play dolls with the diamonds?"

She shook her head, smiling more successfully. "Not in the least too tired," she said. "You should have seen how childish I was with them the other day."

"Good!" said he, and his spirits rose again. "I want to be childish too. I want to put the chalices all in rows, and the chains all in piles, and the rings all in circles——" He broke off, laughing again.

She watched him in gentle amazement. He talked lightly and continuously and encouragingly on as they made their new way back to the yacht, and even as he helped her up the stairs of the ship's side and down into the cabin that had come to seem like home to them. Once there his whim took large possession of him. He sent Fong for all the other bags and tumbled their contents upon the floor with a reckless hand.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE RING OF CHARLEMAGNE

SHE watched him somewhat idly, for all that the treasure looked like an enchanted flower-garden all about her, luring her attention; watched him range the chalices, and coil the chains and stack the rings as he had said he wished to do. But presently he began a new assorting that interested her. She leaned forward the better to see what he was doing, yet even so could not understand. He was setting aside one chalice from another, one censer from its mate, one buckle as against an equal clasp, and so on through the whole immense mass of the stuff, until he had it all in four great divisions on the floor.

This accomplished, he came to be somehow very near her chair, and a mere turn of the head brought him face to face with her, as he knelt before her. She saw that his eye was grave and tender, and the hand he laid over hers was gentle with a sympathy no words could have expressed.

"Dear little girl," he said, "we have found the treasure of the Archangel and it is ours."

"Yours," she said softly, but he paid no heed.

"It is ours," he said. "I don't want to hurt you, oh, you know I don't. Yet there is something of which I must speak, even at the risk of touching too new a wound. When we set out on this quest, this search for the forbidden treasure, there were four of us. Now there are two. Those two who are gone, both of them held you the dearest thing in life, both of them loved you as the one dear creature the world could hold for them. And if they were here at this moment"— his own voice faltered with the heart-felt wish that they were—"they would have no greater pleasure than in putting their share of these rare things at your dear feet. Therefore, dear lady, here they are, your own fair share, and your father's and Berwind's and here is mine. And out of them all we will give something to Fong when the time is ripe."

"You mean that you wish me to take one-fourth for myself, and then one-fourth for my father, and then a fourth for my friend?"

He nodded sincerely without speaking.

"And you think for one instant that I would do it?"

His eyes clouded as he looked at her.

"You think," she said, almost with an angry tone in her soft voice, "that I would take one-tenth of what so righteously belongs to you? Haven't I heard my own father say the whole credit was yours, that he happened to be able merely to translate those passages which any scholar could have done for you? You found the bell; it was you who discovered the likeness of this spot to the drawing of the hills, and it was you who brought the old monster to bay and made it disgorge the treasure it had stolen. What part do I bear in all this, I ask you? None whatever! I am a rich girl, Mr. Stuart, but even were I as poor as a cabin boy I should not take even a small, small share of what lies there."

His disappointment looked out of his eyes into the stubborn determination that looked from hers. And then she smiled suddenly.

"Just to please you I will take one thing, just as a token of the Vatna's downfall. Yes, I remember father said he would take one chalice as his fair share. Give me one piece, whichever one you will, and then let us pack the wonder stuff away."

"But only one?" he demurred.

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"Only one," she said sternly; "any one you please."

He remained on his knees near her, looking into her face a moment, and she felt herself growing slowly more rosy under the look of his gray eyes.

Stuart put his hand into the pocket of his coat and drew something forth, and without taking his eyes from her face, held it toward her. She put out her hand, her brows going upward in a dainty puzzlement. Their fingers touched and she felt the weight of something fall into her palm. Then as he, still silently, took his hand away she looked curiously down.

The great square emerald carved with the likeness of the Archangel and set in its wonderfully inwrought gold flared up at her with its flawless fire.

"Oh!" she cried, "Oh!"

"You would like that?" he questioned, bending nearer to see it in her hand.

"I am afraid it is far more than I meant to take," she answered, troubled.

"Put it on," he said evenly. His voice was very quiet and repressed.

HER hands began to tremble at that, and the instinctive motion that she made to put it on the ring-finger of her left hand confused her the more. She was about to put it on her right hand when he stopped her.

"No, put it there," he said.

She obeyed. "It is very much too large," she said.

"You can have it made smaller, I am sure," he said, "by some clever workman who would not destroy the symmetry of the design."

His voice sounded inattentive as if he were not quite thinking of what he said. He took the hand in his and looked at it closely, turning the ring about a little with his other hand and watching the play of verdant fire in the stone. She could not have known what temptations assailed him nor how bitterly he had to fight to repulse them, for he did not move and his hands were steady and not a muscle of his face changed. But, nevertheless, under that calm exterior, a passionate desire to fling resolution and honor to the winds and plunge into the long-fought confession of his increasing and consuming love, raged against his better nature like one possessed of a devil.

He waited a moment, but the torment did not pass. He knelt there holding her hand in his, her hand with his ring upon it, and then, before it was too late, he bent his head and kissed it gently, then rising to his feet went straightway up the steps of the companion and out into the cool night air.

If he had been seeking some assuagement of his mood, he found it. If he came hoping to forget for a few moments, at least, the rending hurt of his love for her, he was not disappointed. For there was that waiting him that was to drive all other thoughts from his mind. He was going to forget to praise his lady in cursing himself.

He seemed to know it almost before he saw. The moment he set foot on the deck he turned and went toward it as if some one had met him with the message. He walked straight toward the step leading down the ship's side as if he had come up for that very purpose and had been told what he should find.

The blanket of despair that was flung about him in that moment seemed to smother the very breath of life in his nostrils.

The launch was gone! Their only hope of getting away and fighting a way back to civilization was done for!

In his boyish eagerness about the treasure and his anxiety to clear her beloved brow of the cloud he saw had settled there in the stressful hour of his danger, he had neglected the launch. Fong had made her fast to the side of the yacht and left her there, which was indeed the best he knew. But the helpless little craft had been ground between the steel hull of the ship and the great crowding cakes of ice and the mere wreckage of her drifted about at the end of the line.

He leaned against the rail, staring, unable to believe in this last blow of Fortune and yet only too conscious that it was true. What on earth could they do now? He could curse himself and upbraid himself and ridicule himself to his heart's content, but what good was that going to do?

All thought of the treasure, up till this moment so engrossing and enthralling, vanished from his mind. But one thought had he place for—their last boat was gone! Naturally, there was a raft to be thought of—he could make a raft if he had to pry the deck from the *Blessed Damozel* to do it,

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but what could a raft do for them? He remembered the seas he had had to contend with in Sveatur's snug little boat. He would have given the treasure of the Archangel to have her now. It was madness, yet it was the only thing left them. It was certain death!

He leaned there, sick at heart, watching the great ice floes go slowly past, each giving a cruel blow to the ruined launch. His heart was beyond comfort and his soul was the habitation of despair.

CHAPTER XLIX

AWAY FROM THE RIVER OF SNORR

HE WAS still leaning there when Fong came up to call him to dinner. He had been debating the matter in his mind as calmly as he could and had resolved to tell her what had happened. She would have to know, when he began to make preparations for the best deep sea-going tea-tray he could devise. And that would be on the morrow.

Fong called him again. So he squared his shoulders and went down and told her. As he had expected, she took it very quietly.

Fong had patiently and laboriously collected the treasure and repacked it. Stuart happened to remember it as he sat down to dinner with her, and saw that on her left hand she was wearing the big emerald ring. Clever little threads, fastened to her wrist, secured it against loss and she watched it continually in the light for the marvelous flashes of its color.

Sweet as it was to sit there looking at her, listening to her dear voice and watching her beloved face listen to him when he spoke, he was glad when the dinner was over and she had played a little for him, and when he had wearily excused himself and gone away.

He went into his stateroom and, taking off his coat, lighted his pipe and lay down upon the bed. "How can I make a raft that will serve us?" And in spite of the fact that the life of his beloved hung on his ability to protect her, he could not fix his mind upon the answer of the question.

Here they were left with no one but a blessed fool of a Chinaman and a beautiful yacht, and a prize brindle bull terrier. One might as well be left at the North Pole with a motor-car and a rose-tree.

Then there was the treasure. Now that meant far more than mere gold-greediness. He bit hard on the stem of his pipe as he thought of it. Suppose he did succeed in saving Nora's life, and had to leave the treasure behind? Things fell back into the old groove. She was a millionaire and he a poor student. To live on her money or ask her to live on his poverty were equally impossible. So the situation had a double string.

The raft would have to hold not only three people and a dog and provisions, but the treasure of the Archangel.

Sleepiness waxed and grew great and bore down his eyelids. And with a confused jumble of abbots, emeralds, yachts and Chinamen in his mind, a dying pipe in his fingers, and a question of a raft on his lips he fell asleep, heavily, as a sack of meal might slip from a wharf into the deep water.

Dreamless, motionless, nerveless, he slept. One hour after another hour went by.

And then, roused by some physical or mental activity, in the midst of a blank space, his half-sated eyes opened slowly, drunkenly, and fixed themselves upon the round brass-bound glass of his porthole. In another instant he sat erect, staring.

The ship was rolling from side to side, and past the lens of his little window the waters of the ocean swung thickly past, as the *Blessed Damozel* careened onward, leaving behind her the fiord where the River of Snorr flows into the River of Halpa between the mountains of Sigurda and the Bull.

CHAPTER L

TWO SAILS AND A RUDDER

UP THE long wrinkled slope of the Atlantic rollers, hanging like a piece of wreckage on the crest of a huge swell, then sagging heavily, endlessly, down into the trough of the sea, the *Blessed Damozel* careened helplessly along to the southward, sternwise, broadwise, floundering haphazard, before the brisk-off-shore breeze that sang behind her.

On the masts, the long disused halyards rapped out a shrewish protest against the indignity of the situation. The plates of the rusted ventilators clinked and rattled. Somewhere deep in the bowels of the ship clanged the jar of endlessly wrenched machinery. From stem to stern there seemed no finger-span of the tormented vessel but raised its own individual creak, rattle and thump.

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To Stuart, who had rushed on deck dragging his coat upon him as he ran, it was not the grotesqueness of the yacht's aspect, however, which appeared important, but the pressing necessity of something's being done. Pure bull-luck, as he hurriedly phrased it to himself, had saved them from being dashed upon the rough promontory which guarded the harbor entrance and which now loomed safely far behind.

A continuance of such luck, however, was more than could reasonably be looked for. It must be by his own hand, if by any means in this world, that the unfortunate craft must be saved from the fate that threatened her. To the right and left the gray sea was sown with huge floating ice-hummocks, like a November garden with hoar-patches.

The ice-floe which had so long held the *Blessed Damozel* a prisoner had given her release by parting her hawser chain, only to follow her with threats of a worse fate. Should some means not be found to steer a course among the drifting bergs, the yacht must speedily follow the fate of her unfortunate tender.

To get up steam was not a practical notion, though it at first occurred to him, for to be stoker, engineer and steersman all in one, even with a Chinese boy and young lady to stand alternate watch, was rather too much of an order. To steer her under bare poles was possible with such a wind, but cumbrous and uncertain.

He surveyed the masts from where he hung reeling on the deck. Gaff, hoops and boom were there complete enough, waiting only the bending of the sails. He wondered whether the artistic looting of the yacht by Healy and his mates had left any canvas at all on board.

Stuart ran forward, calling down the forecastle to its solitary occupant. He was not at all sure that above the noise of the driven ship his voice had carried, but a moment later Fong Charley, who with the mysteriously sleepless habits of the Orientals was on the alert to obey the summons, came up on deck.

His face was of a fixed pallor and his slit-like eyes followed with horrified glance the great gray seas that swung seething past the vessel's rail. But with the patient self-control of his race he listened to the swift and detailed directions which Stuart flung to him for seeking the necessary canvas.

As Fong, with unsteady steps, started aft in his search, Mark turned swiftly to the steps of the bridge. His first idea was to see the state of the sea down to leeward; the second was to inspect the condition of the steering-gear. So erratic, however, was the vessel's progress between whirling gust and eddying tide-rip that it was impossible with any degree of accuracy to foresee the course of her unguided progress. To port and starboard white, wave-washed pinnacles dotted the seas. Until steerage-way could be obtained to guide her among the deadly enemies, the yacht's dependence must still be bull-luck as before.

WITH stiff, cold hands, Stuart grasped the wheel, which was almost as large as that of an ocean liner. To the right, to the left, he threw his entire force, but the wheel refused to turn. Moisture and long neglect had stuck the gear fast.

In the offing, a huge triangular berg was swinging majestically down across their course! With an eager eye Stuart measured the distance between the yacht and the drifting menace. If the wheel were to be restored to usefulness, his errand must be done immediately. Closing his eyes desperately to the danger that loomed so imminent before them, he scrambled hastily down the steps of the deck and then, reeling to the forward companion, plunged down the stairs. Hurtling through the passage and doorways innumerable and going down ladders like a monkey, he reached the engine-room where the mutinous engineers had left dirt and disorder behind them.

After a frantic whirlwind search he pounced upon a long-nosed tin oil can, shook it near his ear, and sprang up the ladder again. Breathlessly, furiously, he retraced his way upward to the bridge.

Just to the windward the great ice mountain swung slowly down on the yacht's drifting course. Tilting the can, Stuart forced the slow yellow gouts into the bearings of the wheel. Then with his whole weight he bore down upon the spokes, forcing them sideways and downward beneath his hands.

For the moment it seemed to him the strength of two men that he put into his task. The wheel cracked and gave, grudgingly. With a heavy breath Stuart inverted his push. To the other side the

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wheel ran farther. Then, as the trickling oil licked the corroded bearings, it yielded suddenly beneath his weight and the rim flew round like that of a spinning-wheel.

Stuart went down sprawling, but was up again as he heard Fong's high-pitched call. The little Chinaman was struggling with a mass of canvas, the immense folds, as he unrolled them, lying about him like a grand opera sea.

Inspection showed an under-sized foresail and a jib, the rest of the yacht's suit of canvas having been cut for wrappings by the mutineers. How Fong had dragged them out, there was no time to wonder.

With the gusty northwester, which persistently caught the canvas folds and bellied them out roaring, the bending of the foresail was a slow and irritating job. The unsteered yacht, spinning this way and that on the long, sliding rollers, made the task yet more difficult.

Every ten minutes or so Stuart, holding his aching head between his hands, was forced to run up to the bridge, to twist the wheel this way and that, to guide the craft from some imminent peril of floating ice. Then hurrying down again to the deck with unsteady steps, he returned to his task of lacing the wind-blown sail to boom, hoops and gaff, with the lengths of marline supplied by Fong. The heavy canvas slapped and eddied about him. His arms were weary and his finger-nails broken to the quick long before the sail, loosely secured in its gaskets, was ready for hoisting.

There still remained the bending of the jib, less troublesome, but an infinitely more hazardous piece of work. A few moments' toil sufficed to reeve sheets and halyards, then to secure the long thin triangle of canvas in its pack-thread stops.

Beneath the yacht's stem the water seethed and roared. The bow for one instant pointed skyward, a sheer twenty feet above the sea, and the next moment was almost buried in a swirling mass of foam. Added to this motion was the drunken, irresponsible roll of an unpowered and unguided craft. To venture out on the reeling needle of the yacht's jib-boom above that rising and falling whirl of sea was a task for a steady head, but to obtain the balance of driving-power, which alone could give a measure of steerage-way to the unwieldy craft, the head sail was indispensable. Fortunately, the jib-halyards were already reeved and ready belayed in the port fore-rigging. Stuart made them fast to the sail. Then, bracing his feet on the man-ropes, he slid out on the jib-boom.

The sea roared beneath him. One by one the hooks were snapped to the wire jib-stay. With a great breath of relief, Stuart crawled back to the deck. The dancing floor seemed firm as a church beneath his feet, as with Fong's aid he cast off the down-haul, unbelayed the jib-halyard and hoisted away.

THE jib was hoisted, broken out, then sheeted down loosely to port, for the hope was that, when the solitary navigator had mounted his wheel, he might be able to get steerage-way with this northeast wind on the starboard, and his face pointed toward the desired south.

By main strength of their combined pull, Stuart and the muscular little Chinaman succeeded in hoisting the sail for perhaps one-third of its height. Beneath the dancing gaff, the long-hung folds flapped and bellowed. With the jib, however, the bit of foresail served to act as a resistant to the breeze, and to bring the vessel's nose swinging slowly, laboring to windward.

Within a few minutes the *Blessed Damozel* was plunging in the eye of the wind, her blocks clattering like a railroad train, her canvas, relieved of the lateral pressure of the wind, strained away aft. With furious energy and with desperate shouts to Fong, Stuart took advantage of the moment to haul away.

Under the circumstances it was not to be expected that a glove-fit could be given to the sail. As a matter of fact the peak sagged sadly, and the loose-hung leech roared in the wind, but the sail was made.

Then a sudden sea, twisting the boat's nose to starboard, gave her quarter to the wind. With a wild racket the sheet ran out as the foresail swung to port. Stuart, pausing a single instant to belay the sheet as the sail sagged back a hair's breadth, ran with all his speed to the bridge.

To hold the vessel thus till she obtained adequate steerage-way, in this effective direction which chance had given her, was his fierce determination. Breathing heavily with the hurry of his exertions, he bent his strength again upon the wheel, but this time it glided smoothly, obediently beneath his hands. Below, the sails bellied out, and

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the momentum of their pull became slowly, powerfully evident, like the starting of an express train. From a reeling zig-zag the yacht's motion became an independent progress. Her deck was already steadier, and heeled slightly but perceptibly to port.

A huge sea came swinging by her rail. Her nose yawed widely in the wind. Stuart, throwing his weight on the wheel, starboarded his helm. He waited breathlessly. Still the low swing toward the west. The next moment he could have shouted for triumph. For slowly, laboriously, the bow halted and swung back to the south again.

He had succeeded! The *Blessed Damozel*, from being a helpless derelict on the face of the seas, had become a manageable ship once more. From a plunging monster which threatened at any moment to engulf him and one more precious than himself, she had become a potent instrument of safety, obedient to his hand. For the first time since that despairing moment when he found the launch crumpled up in the ice hope rose vivid and sustaining in his soul.

CHAPTER LI

A RAY OF HOPE

AS THOUGH in material confirmation of a warm inward thought, an eddying gust of wind brought to him a familiar and delicious odor. Turning, with one hand still on the wheel, he beheld Nora standing behind him with a triumphant little smile in her rosy face. In one hand she bore a covered plate, in the other a cup of steaming coffee.

"I haven't spilled a drop," she cried, balancing herself on the swaying floor, "not a drop! And if I've been a long time about it, Mr. Stuart, you must remember that I don't know my way very well about, below there among Fong's little oil-stove and copper sauce-pans. But I was bound I'd make that coffee, if I stayed below till we reach New York!"

She paused a moment; then said:

"Mr. Stuart, you remember my old plea for the honest truth, no matter how disheartening that truth might be, so tell me frankly—have we any chance at all?"

His glance dropped from her clear, questioning eyes to the sweet curve of her throat where it disappeared among her furs. Human beauty in its perfect expression she seemed to him, the final flowering of the dominant form of this earth's life.

"Tell me," Nora repeated her question. "Have we any chance at all?"

Mark answered her slowly, while his eyes strained themselves out over the ice-strewn sea beneath them.

"There's a chance for us, yes. A slim chance, but undoubted."

"You are a brave man," she said quietly.

After a long silence, when he turned to glance at her, he saw that she had faced about. Her hazel eyes, dark with the transparency of tears, were gazing back at the somber, misty crags of the Vatna.

For a long time she stood gazing backward over the railing of the bridge toward the wild fantastic peaks which drew every moment farther and farther into the haze of distance. But when she turned back to the steersman, she came close to him and laid one hand on his arm, looking up into the face where she saw his pain.

"I'm not afraid to die," she said in a clear, childlike tone.

Stuart, overwhelmed with the impotent rebellion of a man, weary and despairing, at the mercy of a stronger insentient force, released one hand from the wheel and caught her fiercely to his side.

"But I can't let you die, Nora, darling, I can't!"

His eyes, looking into hers, saw the slow tears force their way to her lashes. Her white face lifted to his was shadowed by a passionate sorrow which was not the fear of death.

"And is it any easier for me?" she whispered. "We must die—I know that—but oh—boy!"

The tenderness of the little word thrilled in the air. Stuart caught his breath, for his heart seemed to have ceased to beat.

The thought that Nora Lee might love him had sometimes come to him as the dim, dazzling, prospect of a heaven hardly to be believed in—as a dream of "joy past joy" at which his own hands, as those of an honorable man, were forbidden to grasp. But here, in the eyes uplifted to his own, was that love looking out at him as a living reality, and here, in the finality of this supreme hour, there could be no reason human or divine to hold him away from her. The death that moment by moment might be coming nearer toward them was forgotten

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—the death which they shared together must be life itself!

With a low cry he drew her closer, and she laid her hand upon his cheek.

How closely or how long he held her so, forgetting everything, he could not know. But when he lifted her hidden face, it shone with a sweet transfiguration, and she gave her lips to him with a blind happiness that defied the intervention of death itself. The kiss left her throbbing, but not with fear. Yet as she opened her eyes and looked into his face, she saw something there that sent a change throughout her quickened heart. He was, even in the moment of holding her so for the first time, staring over her head with eyes she could not understand.

She did not turn. She kept her hands upon his shoulders and her eyes upon his face.

"Has it come?" she whispered bravely. "Oh, my love, I am not afraid now, since we can go like this!"

She felt a great bursting breath inflate his heart.

"Oh, my God!" he said, his voice shaking. "Look!"

She turned then. There on the pale radiance of the yellow, eastern horizon was silhouetted the black, bending outline of a sail!

CHAPTER LII

ABOARD THE FISHING-SCHOONER

AT LAST, in answer to the cannon and to the reversed ensign in the rigging of the *Blessed Damozel*, the schooner put about and headed her plunging course straight for the lurching yacht.

The schooner's progress seemed infinitely slow. The wind, which had veered back to the westward, directly headed her course as she approached them. The slow tacks, first to this hand and then to that, in which she crawled toward them, seemed hardly to bring her nearer.

Finally, about a mile to their lee, she seemed to despair of the progress made by her sails. For a moment her canvas shivered in the wind; then a boat dropped over her side.

Stuart and Nora, standing together, hand clasped in hand, could feel the beating of their hearts. A shyness had fallen on her in the sudden miracle of their rescue, and she was silent. But the mad joy of life regiven was riot in their veins.

Suddenly Stuart broke into a cry. His arms waved wildly above his head, wrenching his hand from hers.

"Jewett—Jewett! Oh, my God, Nora, it's Jewett!"

"Who—who?" she said urgently.

"It's Jewett!" cried Stuart, almost beside himself with the excitement. "It's Jewett, God bless him! It's the *Carrie L. Hooper*—and God bless her too! Why didn't I recognize her before—and that old square patch on the foresail? See, he is dropping past us to round up to our lee. Oh, God be thanked, my darling!"

Nora tried to speak, but the voice that had remained steady and clear in the hour of imminent death broke and flattened in her throat like the tones of an overdelighted child. She clung trembling to the rail, laughing and crying at once, while Stuart shouted a response to the wild whoops which now assailed him from the approaching dory. Captain Jewett, making a trumpet of his mittened hands, shouted his amazement and his orders in blended confusion.

"Mr. Stuart, well, gosh all—Mr. Stuart, sir! We'll try you by the port bow—the port bow, sir! Port bow!"

With uptilted oars the dory swung poised on the laboring seas, waiting for her chance.

Stuart spoke hastily to Nora.

"Wait a moment, dearest, while I go down for Fong and Humbug. Stay where you are." He opened the door of the companionway and, with furious haste, precipitated himself through the opening:

"Fong!" he shouted, "Fong!"

"Alle light!" replied a calm voice near him. The little Chinaman came forward a step, Humbug crouching at his feet. The boy's slant eyes, calm in the philosophy with which his race beholds the approach of death, regarded Stuart's excited face. "Alle gone, sir? Alle gone?"

"No, you blooming image, come on!" cried Stuart. "There's a boat here, see? Boat pidgen come savee. Hurry up, lad." In his haste he caught up the dog and stuffed it into Fong's arms. Jewett's shout, half lost in the rhythmic roar of the seas, came to him faintly. He pushed the boy toward the stair. "Hurry, can't you?" he cried.

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But against Stuart's compelling hand Fong struggled in resistance. He dropped the dog incontinently to the floor. His outstretched arms in their blue sleeves flapped in a desperate gesture toward a pile of luggage behind him in the salon.

"Takee bag along, takee bag!" said Fong.

STUART stared and then broke into a long, whistling breath.

"The treasure!" he said. "By Jingo, I had forgotten all about it! Fong Charley, I take off my hat to you! This is a master stroke that shall not be forgotten." He laughed aloud. "I had forgotten that my millions had to go with me."

He was running up the companionway as he spoke, and sawed with his jack-knife at a coil of rope. Behind him struggled Fong with the howling dog under one arm and a suit-case under the other, both hands gripping a second and third. Nora Lee from the bridge, where she had obediently remained, saw, and obedience ended. As Stuart slashed the rope into a number of ends, and the invisible rescuers shouted vainly in the lee of the yacht, Nora came hurriedly down and took charge of the encumbering dog, as Fong dived again into the cabin.

"I had forgotten the treasure!" she exclaimed.

"So had I," retorted Stuart, as he bent over his task, securing the lines in swiftly adjusted lashings with long loops pendent about the heavy chinking cases.

"Now, Fong!" he called.

With up-poised oars the dory hovered alongside, the men shouting questions no one had time to answer. Stuart made the cases fast to the rail by the loops of line and, with a shout to Jewett, started back for more. Nora, coming more slowly, met him halfway and laughed aloud with sheer joy in the love and life that had come to them. His look answered her as he hurried on.

One or two more trips they made, he and Fong, and then all the cases were stacked by the rail, the treasure of the Archangel under the guise of common luggage. Jewett was shouting in the stern of the dory, as Stuart became aware when he set down the last case.

"Wal, gosh all, maybe you don't want to leave that there hotel? Fixing to die, be ye? Good Lord, what d'ye want of them contraptions? The durn thing'll go down with us as sure as fate. Hey, miss! Hey, Mr. Stuart! Gosh all!"

Stuart waved his arm. "Ready!" he shouted.

With head eagerly turned, the helmsman calculated his chance. "Stand by for a favoring sea!" he called.

In spite of the huge rollers, the maneuver of rescue was accomplished with less difficulty than might have been expected. Nora went first with Humbug. With ready hands the fisherman seized her and the dog as she sprang at Captain Jewett's word over the intervening swirl of water. Again the boat rose and fell—again, as the gunwale rose the helmsman shouted his summons. Blanched with the horror of the swirling seas, the little Chinaman stood helpless by the rail. The time was brief. Stuart, seizing him in a muscular grip, swung his limp body like a sack of corn to the waiting fisherman. In a bundled heap he fell safe in the bottom of the dory.

Then, one by one, while the dory swooped to and fro on the seas, Stuart accomplished unaided the task of transferring the heavily laden bags. The first, owing to its enormous and unexpected weight, ran through the hands of the eager fisherman, and was saved barely by its loop of line. Hand over hand, it was drawn up and hoisted over the gunwale.

NORA, who, with Humbug in her arms, had been handed from one to another until she found herself hospitably drawn into a seat beside the captain, was talking with him, answering his questions and satisfying the curiosity which devoured him. How they had come there, how Stuart got there, what had become of the crew, and, blundering unconsciously into great griefs, where were her father and the doctor he had heard of in Reykjavik—these were the things she had to tell him, confusedly for the most part, for his questions tumbled out one after another before the answers were fairly on her lips. But he noticed that her eyes turned to Stuart, and that her anxiety lest he should remain too long was plainly written in her face even while she hurriedly spoke of other things.

He followed the direction of her eyes.

"Wal, gosh all, you certainly have hed your share o' trouble! Ain't he the durndest fella you ever see, risking his neck, an'

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ourn too fur that matter, just for a passel of rocks? Hey, you, Mr. Stuart," he called up kindly, glad to distract the girl's thoughts from those sadnesses he had recalled to her lips by his unknowing questions, "who but you'd think of stoppin' in a moment like this to unload a lot of truck that weighs like so many flatirons an' ain't good for so much as to start a laundry?"

"Stow all thet!" cried the captain as the men, in spite of the urgency of the moment, turned with eager greetings and questions to Stuart as he leaped among them. "Ye can ask him all that later. Want to swamp us now 'n' all those precious bricks o' his?"

The men bent to their oars obediently, and as Jewett's voice rang in sharp command, the dory shot forward from the lee of the yacht again. He turned the boat's nose toward the *Carrie L. Hooper*, and dropped a rough coat down on Nora's lap.

"Cover yourself up, miss. You're wet. Gosh all, an' a dog! Wal, there, I swan to man!"

Nora smiled up at him, grateful for his thoughtfulness.

"I say, Captain," called Stuart, whose eyes were now on the deserted ship, and now on the face of his beloved, "have you been in Reykjavik lately?"

"No, I ain't, in a manner o' speakin' I ain't," returned the Captain with a loitering importance of the story-teller secure of attention from his audience, as he dexterously twisted the boat's nose to meet the foam-crested sea. "But in a manner o' speakin', yes, I have. On'y yesterday, there on the halibut-ground, who should I meet but the *Abner M. Jollop*, bound out o' Gloucester for halibut same as us. The skipper he happens to be my brother-in-law by my first wife. As I had to go aboard and borry some salt from 'em anyhow, I stayed a bit to swop the news an' some plug tobacco. Easy there, Elmer, on that bow oar!"

With a dexterous twist of the helm the Captain guided the deep-laden dory down the rushing slope of a huge roller. Then in full appreciation of his attentive audience he continued his tale.

"As it happened, the *Jollop* was jest out o' Reykjavik, where she's been takin' in ice. We talked o' one thing an' another, my brother-in-law an' me, an' he give me the gossip o' the place. It seems, sir, your friend Oddi's been gitting married. Likewise, your friend Olavur Haldr has had an offer to go open a hotel in Denmark. An' Mrs. Haldr, she's near off her head to go, but they can't seem to scrape the money together—sounds like home, don't it? However, that ain't to the pint. It seems, folks has been worried about the *Blessed Damozel!*"

HE JERKED his thumb aft toward the ill-fated craft.

"Ah," returned Stuart in surprise, "so they knew she had headed about and made for the Vatna country?"

Jewett nodded.

"They had it from the fishermen that come in. Last was seen of her, she was headed straight up the coast for the ghost-ridden, fire-spittin', frozen-up hole-in-the ground that isn't no more than a plague-spot on God's kind green earth! What did she go there fer? There was more talk 'n a little, I cal'late, though as you know, on that subject they don't talk out loud. But Madame Haldr, she told my brother-in-law —well, she was worried right smart, I reckon!' An' 'twan't all 'bout the damsel here, neither. Fer there was rumors of a man named something like Sweater, who had undertuk to sail you, Mr. Stuart, rumors o' his turning up in Breede Bay sumwheres where he'd got a brother who warn't special glad to see him, so they say.

"Wall, that got 'em wondering what wuz become of you, and Madame Haldr she was worried, although she did say you mought a' closed in with the yacht again along o' wanting to see one of her passengers most amazin'!"

He smiled good-naturedly at the vivid flush that beautified Nora's face at the words, a color reflected, if more dully, underneath Stuart's coppery tan.

"Howsumever," he went on, chuckling at the look that passed between the rescued pair, "it were confidently supposed the *Damozel* 'ud hev to come back to Reykjavik to coal up fore she pinted homeward. So they waited to see where she'd come along. They're still waitin' I guess, or they would be, if 'twern't fer one thing."

They were coming up under the *Carrie's* counter. The Captain, bustling with importance, delayed the completion of his tale.

"Tell us, please," said Nora Lee anxiously.

Jewett bent a kindly glance on her pale face and dark-rimmed, anxious eyes, as he hurried to complete his story.

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"I didn't want to pile up any horrors on you, ma'am, but the fact is, my brother-in-law told me, only last Thursday he was talkin' in Reykjavik with some fellers that had come in with strings of ponies from the East country, right on the edge of the great Vatna desert there.

"They told him, he said, of a man that had stumbled into one of them farmhouses jest the night before they left home—mought be a matter of two weeks now. The chap was clean off his head, dyin' in his shoes. 'Twas the thirst of the desert that had bit him. But he carried an empty champagne bottle in his hand, and a white fur boa about his neck all washed out and black—crazy as a coot, he was ravin' about 'gold! gold! gold!' till he died."

Nora's eyes and Stuart's flew to one another.

"There was no one with him, Captain?" asked Stuart. "He came out of the wilderness quite alone?"

"Alone, sir and ma'am," returned the Captain grimly. "Aye, you can lay your Summer's catch on that! However many went into that hell-blasted desert with Con Healy, he come out of it alone!" He turned his face upward with a long wailing cry. "On board the *Carrie L.*—stand by there! Sta-a-a-nd by-y!"

CHAPTER LIII

"MY UNCLES AND AUNTS ARE NOT IN REYKJAVIK"

TEN minutes later they stood all together on the glistening salt-like deck of the fishing schooner. In the high-piled barrels of fish, in the crowding, friendly faces of the men, in the business-like alertness of the craft herself as she heeled over to her course, there was something indescribably real and comforting—even without the solicitous attentions of the Captain, and the hot coffee which the men were even then preparing for their breakfast.

"I've put your Chinaman away below," said the Captain jocularly, "with them suit-cases full o' rocks that you think so much of, sir. Gosh all Friday! Salvin' rocks from a sinkin' ship! But as I always say, one man's meat's another man's poison. An' now, jest as soon as you've et your breakfasts, I'll look out for warm rugs for the little lady here, so's we can dry her things for her. Then I'll give her a chanst to git some sleep—the Lord only knows what you've been through, you two unfortnit children! But you're safe now on board the old *Carrie L.* Mind I tell you! And to-morrow night, as sure as my name's Jewett, we'll land the two of you safe an' sound in Reykjavik!"

But Nora laid her hand on Stuart's arm.

"Just one turn down the deck," she said softly. "Just to make sure I'm not dreaming. If I go right to sleep now, how shall I know that it is all real?"

"Hev your own way," said Jewett, smiling. "Only remember, ma'am, ther's a schooner full o' men just plumb crazy to hear this man talk and tell his story. Don't keep him too long, 'r' I can't answer fer the consequences." He nodded them away and turned back with a sigh. "Gosh all," he said, "'n' I waz jest as bad myself once!"

With slow steps up the sharply heeled and slippery deck Stuart and Nora walked toward the bow together. On either side were nests of dories, securely lashed, and barrels of fish. All was glistening and shiny with salt and fish-scales.

But the various details of lax New England discipline fell with no disgust upon Nora's delicate senses. Rather they brought her a convincing sense of security.

"It must be real because I can smell it!" she said with a little laugh, as they stood together in the bow. "But it seems too good to be true—is it real, after all? Can it be real?"

His eyes met hers. For the first time their love stood confessed, not beneath the creeping chill of death, but in the full glow and actuality of life. They were worn, weary and battered. Stuart's hair hung in wet, unkempt masses about his forehead. His clothes were weather-worn to a curious uncouthness. Nora's eyes were darkened with fatigue and her delicate brilliant skin was dulled with long exposure to the sun. Her fur coat, faded with the water and soaked with the dashing spray, gave her the appearance of a drowned kitten. But if the first glance would have placed them below the contempt of a civilized beggar, the second would have proved them above the envy of a king. For through their sea-worn shabbiness pierced and kindled a splendor of youth, of personal comeliness, and of transfiguring love.

For a moment they stood staring at each other like two children newly awakened.

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These two beings, so long immured to calamity and to tragic solitude, found it impossible to believe in the moment which in giving them back to the kindly world of men gave them each to the other's unconcealed and faithful tenderness.

"Yes, it is real," he said slowly. "All danger and the griefs are gone. Out of the dreadful past we keep only the dear and sacred memories, is it not so? And before us lies the future."

"The future!" she said softly.

DESPITE the ringing cries of the sailors astern of them they were shut off by the swelling foresail into a little world of their own. Stuart stood close to her and looked down into her face.

"The future made possible," he said. "For us and for others."

Her eyes still questioned him and he still smiled. "It means, for one thing, that dear old Madame Haldr need no longer hunger and thirst after Thuringia, but she shall be filled. Wouldn't you like to give them enough of the treasure to buy their hotel and let them live happy ever after?"

Her eyes sparkled with delight.

"And then it means that Fong can go back to his kith and kin a rich man for his faithfulness, and live in peace and plenty all the rest of his pidgen life. And it means that Captain Jewett and all these good fellows can cruise about in such schooners as they never dreamed to set foot upon as owners, and can tell the tale of the Vatna to their grandchildren in snug habitations when their fishing days are done. All these things it means, Nora—we are forcing the Vatna to atone."

She clasped her hands upon his arm. "How good you are!" she said. "And what fun it will be to see their happiness and their surprise when you give it to them!"

He shook his head. "You will have to do that," he answered. "As for me, Nora, think what the treasure means to me! That I may ask you now in the fullness of life for what you gave me under the shadow of certain death. Do you give it to me again, dear love?"

She loosed her hands and held them out to him. "If you will have me," she said softly. "Oh, Mark dear, if you want me!"

He took her hands and kissed them, one and then the other.

"Sweetheart, sweetheart!" he said.

Even as she watched his bared blonde head bend over her hands, she flushed and smiled.

"But you know," she said, her breath fluttering, "now that we are going back to civilization things will be different; we can't go on traveling with just a dog and a Chinaman as chaperons!"

A little chill fell upon him. He had not thought of a parting however temporary, and yet, of course, it would have to be faced. She wanted to go to her own people, and he could not even go with her. He would have to follow her on another steamer and there would be wearisome days without her. How was he to endure them, he who had had her every day and all day for so long? And then would come the endless waiting and the delays of the wedding.

He straightened and his hands fell to his sides. "Oh, Nora, I had forgotten all that part!" he said, like a mournful, disappointed boy. "I suppose we can't go about like this any more until we are married. And how long shall I have to wait for that, sweetheart? Have you a lot of ogress aunts and stuffy uncles who will make delays?"

"I have rather a large family," she admitted, smiling.

"But I want you now—now!" he said.

He put his hands on her shoulders and looked into her upturned face. The color was dimpling in her cheeks again and the old dancing look he had not seen in her eyes for so many weeks shone at him with a happy mockery. He leaned down, holding her so, his comely tanned countenance frowning stupendously, as he considered her.

"I want you now—yes," he said, "and I believe I shall have to cut short the whole business and carry you off. Those uncles and aunts——"

As he paused, her dimples deepened.

"My uncles and aunts are not in Reykjavik," she said quietly.

THE END

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Fighting the Turks in Macedonia

The Adventures of an Unofficial War Correspondent

by Arthur D Howden Smith *

I SHALL never forget that awful march after the fight at Osikove. When the sun finally rose over the eastern peaks of the Balkans, the *cheta*† was straggling in a tenuous, broken line along a bare ridge. At the head of the column, Mileff, Nicola and I were clustered together. The rest followed any way, the wounded man on a litter bringing up the rear.

We were all wearied to the point of utter exhaustion, as much by the intense excitement and nervous strain as by our physical efforts. But we could not stop. We knew that we could not stop. Long ere this, perhaps, the crackle of rifle-fire that had persisted through the night at Osikovo had reached the ears of some *askare*‡ patrol. And already, perhaps, the dreaded *enceinte* was closing in, welding a ring of iron and steel about the whole neighborhood. For all we knew, our enemies might have headed us off. So we toiled on and on, plumbing the utmost depths of fatigue and despair.

It was noon before we found opportunity to rest—or, rather, before Mileff's iron will and sense of strategy would permit us to take the risk of halting. We were in a deep ravine in the heart of one of the ranges that rise in serrated groups throughout this part of Macedonia. A dark curtain of pine trees shut us in, and we felt sufficiently secure to light a fire. Over this tiny blaze those who were not too weary roasted bits of bacon on pointed sticks or ramrods. But few could eat. We were too sickeningly tired to relish food. I sank down where I found myself, caught my knapsack under my head for a pillow, folded my cloak

*Mr. Smith, a young American moved by the spirit of adventure, secured letters of introduction to the Balkan Committee in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, that country being secretly friendly to the Macedonian revolutionists in their struggle against Turkey. He is allowed, at his own risk, to join one of the fighting *chetas* or revolutionary bands. As they expect no mercy from the Turks, each man carries a little package of arsenic in case of capture. In the preceding article Mr. Smith has told how the little band wiped out a Turkish detachment quartered in a Macedonian village. It is worthy of note that Mr. Smith was only nineteen years old at the time of these experiences, the Summer of 1907.—THE EDITOR.

† A band of revolutionary soldiers.

‡ Turkish regular soldier.

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around the breech of my rifle and such of my body as it could cover after that, and was lost to slumber in no time.

Late that night we started again in two parties. The militiamen, carrying the wounded man with them, were to return to Kovatchavishta, while the *chetniks** pressed on to Fortovishta, another village of the *raon*.† Nicola returned to Kovatchavishta with the militia detachment to take up his duties as courier. It was to be several weeks before I should see him again, and as I pressed his hand I did not dream of the many exciting adventures that would befall me before that happened.

The country that we had to march through to reach Fortovishta was mostly Turkish. Frequently we passed villages, and the greatest care had to be used to make no noise. Finally, at a point midway between two Turkish villages, we were compelled to halt to await the coming of a guide who would escort us by little-known paths into the village we were seeking. Thanks to the excellent arrangements of the revolutionary organization of the *raon*, Mileff's movements were always known in advance by those who were in his confidence. And it may be taken as a remarkable tribute to the loyalty of the people over whom he ruled as Governor for the Three in Sofia that a traitor was never found among them—something which could not be said for other *raons* in Macedonia.

It was a ticklish period while we waited in the grass by the roadside for the coming of our promised guide. At the expiration of a half-hour we were almost ready for flight, when we spied two cloak-wrapped figures stealing through the tall grass, bent nearly double. Mileff whistled gently, and the figures stopped. He whistled again, and one, stepping forward, stood erect, with cloak flung back. Beneath the cloak a rifle gleamed. This man whistled a long-drawn, sibilant note, not unlike Mileff's call—and the *voivode*‡ hailed him.

"We are friends," he said clearly. "*Viva Makedonia!* Let us hurry from this place of dogs and Turks, men of Fortovishta."

We were still several hours distant from Fortovishta, because of the necessity for the *cheta* to approach the village by a roundabout way, and it was long past midnight when we entered its craggy streets. On the following day the village priest—like all his kind, a friend of the revolution—called on us to exchange news. He was much interested in our story of the fight, reports of which were fast spreading through the *raon*, and in return for our budget he told us that seven other *chetniks* were in hiding in another house of the village. The next night we joined them.

Of the seven men who joined us here, I shall mention only two, because their personalities were distinct from all the rest. One was Peter Yaknoff (*Le Beau Pierre*, or "Handsome Peter," he was called), and the other was Giorgi Vanoff, or just plain Giorgi, a pudgy, rolypoly bit of a man, and one of the most superb cooks it has ever been my privilege to meet. Campaigning with Giorgi was a treat and a luxury. When it came to foraging—well, he showed what an art could be made of a seemingly vulgar calling.

THE next day we celebrated with a grand dinner the victory of Osikovo and the reunion of the *chetniks*; but at ten o'clock that night we marched for Gherman, a large village, in which Miss Stone was detained during her captivity by the insurgents. For the first hour we plowed our way across swampy rice-fields, often waist-deep in water and sticky mud; but in the end we came out into more open country, a country of fairly good roads, running level and straight, and subject to the visits of the Turkish patrols.

We reached Gherman safely after a terribly hard march, and with some satisfaction in the knowledge that we would have several days' rest here. Indeed, we stayed in Gherman for three days, while Mileff held council with several members of his *raon* committee from different near-by villages.

The Mileff *cheta* was a much-depleted body of men when it left Gherman to return to Fortovishta. Two detachments were charged with carrying dispatches to neighboring insurgent chiefs, so that only about half the *cheta's* strength remained with the *voivode*.

But, fortunately, our march that night was less eventful than usual. When we reached Fortovishta, we found that for some unknown reason our militia guides had not taken pains to patrol the route

* Revolutionary soldiers.
† District.
‡ Chief.

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through the streets to the house that was to be our hiding-place. So we had to wait on the second floor of a granary on the edge of the village while due arrangements were made for our traversing the place. There were always sure to be a few Mohammedans even in the Christian villages, and it was not well to take chances, particularly as the punishment following detection always descended upon the heads of the helpless villagers who entertained the *chetniks*.

At first we waited quietly in the granary, scarce daring to breathe a word. Presently some one cracked a joke, and the tension relaxed. In a second we were all laughing and talking—quietly, of course, but as naturally as if we knew no such thing as danger.

Into this picture obtruded, through a shadowy trap-door, the head of the ancient farmer. He viewed the squatting figures of the swaying *chetniks* with amazement, grunted in surprise or disgust and signified that we were to follow him. Ten minutes later we were safe in the house of the headman.

We spent two days in Fortovishta, changing houses the following night, according to the *chetnik* custom. As a general precaution, we never spent two nights in succession in the same house. It made an indubitably precarious existence a trifle safer. There were spies everywhere, even in the best organized villages. Perhaps I should explain that the chief was now deep in the midst of a campaign of organization of the mountain villages in his *raon*. Fortovishta, hanging half-way between the mountains and the plain, was classed with the former, as a matter of convenience, I suppose. At any rate, it made a convenient gathering point for leading insurgents of the vicinity who came to hold council with Mileff.

He was busy with them all the time we were in the village, and on the second night we marched to a village named Banitchan, higher in the mountains, where another important conference had been arranged.

As soon as we got there, in the intense darkness of early morning, men came stealing in to talk to him; and the last I saw of him as I dozed off, he was going through heaps of papers, some in cipher, and maintaining a running fire of questions upon the half-dozen men who squatted about him.

Directly after supper on the next night we started for Yoosdarroch, a lonely little mountain village beyond the great town of Navarrokop, which sprawls under the wall of the valley. It was the wildest and roughest night's march we had had since the terrible night of Osikovo. Much of the way we traveled through a maze of deeply cut gullies that ramified across the surface of the valley. Once we came to a road, the main road which runs through the valley into the town of Navarrokop, where are the Governor's palace and the barracks of the soldiery. In single file we trotted across this road, white in the starlight. As the last man stepped into the low bushes on the farther side, from some distance up the valley came the rattle of arms, voices and the tramp of marching men. It was the Turkish patrol. Without waiting for any orders, our line dropped into the bushes.

We hugged the ground close, unlocked the hammers of our Mannlichers and waited. Presently, the white ribbon of the highway was barred by a black moving mass, with here and there a flash of metal as a breech-block caught the star-sheen. The mass rapidly took shape as a line of men; they pounded along at the regulation marching pace, stirring up a veil of gray dust and chattering aimlessly to one another, never dreaming of the death that lurked in the roadside bushes. I think we could have decimated their files with a single volley. But to tell the truth, I was too badly scared at the time to think of this. I had a consummate desire to sneeze, and I knew that if I gave way to it there would surely be a fight.

When the noise of the *askare* column had died away in the direction of Navarrokop, we took up our march toward the mountains. The ground became more elevated, and we could see more of the surrounding country under the star-sprinkled skies. Huddled here and there behind shoulders of the hills, sparkled the lights of isolated villages. A great blur of lights on the southern horizon was Navarrokop.

Climbing the summit of a ridge, the full glare of the lights burst on our view, and the town lay spread out before us, its streets and squares mapped in a glowing pattern, so near, apparently, that it was not hard to fancy oneself capable of jumping into the minaret of one of the mosques. The *chetniks* stopped in their tracks to gaze on the picture. I do not suppose any feeling of poetic beauty or romance influenced them. They were probably thinking of the

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3,000 *askares* of the garrison, and the splendid pickings there would be in the loot of such a Moslem stronghold.

INTO our reverie, with a jar that was all but physical, crashed a rifle-shot! It seemed to come from a point directly below us, and naturally our first thought was flight. All that I remember after that is seemingly endless hours of trotting and walking, nearly all the time climbing upward. As a matter of fact, we surmounted two ranges of hills, and it was long after midnight when we topped the second and came upon a sheepfold belonging to the villagers of Yoosdarroch. A squad of these white-kilted mountaineers were waiting in the shadow of its stone walls ready to guide us the rest of the way to their remote home; and we were not sorry when we stumbled through the steep and crooked streets into a house that had been made ready for our reception. I was asleep before my body touched the floor.

The next day a man, tattered and disheveled, burst into the house. By his Mannlicher, we knew him instantly for a militiaman.

With trembling lips, and between the great pants of his laboring chest, he told of a new raid that had been inflicted on his father's lonely farmstead, several miles distant in the mountains. He, his father and his brother had been away, and in their absence a squad of cavalry had carried off the women and several sheep. He knew that the *chetniks* were in Yoosdarroch and came to them for assistance. Now Mileff had special reasons for wishing to avoid a fight at this time, but he could not refuse the poor fellow's request for aid, especially in view of what he had just said. Fifteen minutes after the messenger's arrival we were ready to start. Three of the villagers, armed and equipped, marched with us, bringing our force up to a dozen men, ample for the work in hand.

At a notch in the side of a mountain, on a wide plateau covered with waving grass and corn-stalks, we came upon the violated homestead. A pool of blood smeared the doorstep, where a sheep had been killed to sate the first appetite of the marauders. To prove their ruthlessness, they had thrown the dead body aside as useless to them. As we came up to the door, a second man, young, like him who marched with us, rose from a crouching position beside the pool of blood, and in monosyllables directed his brother which course to take to catch up with his father, who was hanging on to the trail of the *askares*.

Then he, too, took his place at the rear of the line. He had no rifle; he had given his Mannlicher to his father, in case he should come up with the enemy. One of the *chetniks* turned and handed him an extra revolver. The man took it, thanked him dully, and we marched on, now under cloudy skies, beginning to lower with a threat of rain.

All through the night we marched, stopping every hour for ten minutes' rest. We moved with absolute silence, for we were edging into the enemy's country, and for the first time I noticed the use of an old trick of Indian warfare in America—that of covering the trail by making each man step in the footprints of the leader. There was the faintest hint of gray dawn in the sky beyond the hulking mountain peaks when a low, shrill whistle came out of the darkness of the gulley. Old hands at the game, the *chetniks* dropped to the rocks, every man instinctively getting behind the nearest and likeliest bit of cover.

A voice followed the whistle, calling "*Bhotoff! Bhotoff!*" the universal pass-word of the insurgents.

Mileff answered, and an old man whose straight figure gave the lie to his gray hair and beard rose from the shadows and strode noiselessly toward us, moving with catlike softness in his sandals.

In short, bitter words he told of his pursuit of the raiders. A sweep of his arm up the mountain-pass indicated their position. He went on to say that they were bivouacking in a glen, waiting until morning to proceed, and that if we were expeditious we might catch up with them. There followed a brief consultation, and then we pushed on, switching sideways, however, up the narrow gulley where the old man had lain concealed. Some distance up this gulley we struck another one, running at right angles, and thence we followed several, always winding and twisting upward, until at last we found ourselves on the summit of a ridge forming one wall of the pass.

The old man and Andrea went forward alone, and after a five-minute interval we followed them, bending double, so that our figures should not stand forth against the

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skyline. We had not gone far before we came upon our advance guard lying behind a mammoth boulder. They signaled us to drop beside them. Peering around a corner of the mass of stone, I saw that the pass had opened out into a miniature valley, the walls of which sloped gradually. A brook gushed along one side, and on its right-hand bank across from us a camp-fire sent up a thin reek of smoke. To a near-by shrub half a dozen horses were tethered by their bridles, and men lay on the short grass of the brook-bank. Three heaps of colored cloth inanimate on the ground were the mother and daughters.

With a curiosity I could not check, I glanced at the face of one of the sons beside me, and then along the line at his father and brother. There was the same dull look of agony in each face, but their eyes blazed like hot coals. At first we did nothing beyond assuring ourselves that our rifles were in order. Andrea made careful calculations of the range, and Mileff crept up and down the rear, making sure that all understood the orders. We were to fire two volleys and then charge.

"How about the women?" some one asked.

"It does not matter," the old man interposed grimly. "Do not think of them. They must take their chances. It might be as well should a bullet strike them."

I could understand his meaning, and I tried not to see where he aimed his rifle.

The *voivode*, from his position in the center of the line, glanced inquiringly at his men. He saw a line of rifle-barrels leveled over the rocks.

"*Heidil*" he exclaimed.

The mountain walls echoed and reëchoed the crashing volleys. There was no smoke-veil, and I could see the *askares* rolling on the ground or running frantically toward their horses.

IT WAS real. Oh, yes, very real. The *chetniks* were charging down the hillside, stopping only to fire at the men and horses beneath. Far in the lead, the old peasant plunged along, absolutely reckless, apparently bent only on getting to hand-grips with one of the Turks. A single *askare* was left standing, and he was tugging at the bridle of a horse. Bullets spat on the ground about him and clipped the branches of the bush the horse was tied to. I can not be sure of it, but it looked very much to me as if it was a bullet that freed his mount.

At any rate, the man leaped on the horse's back and, regardless of the banging stirrups, galloped off down the ravine out of the medley of dead men and screaming, wounded horses. He never looked behind him; he galloped away as if the Devil were at his heels. And, in truth, when I pulled myself from the water of the brook, it was to find a very slaughter-pen, in which the old peasant was the central figure, kneeling beside one of his daughters, who had been killed.

The second girl and her mother knelt beside him, but there was no look of prayer on their faces; there was more of an expression of wonderment that Divine mercy could not have been shown to them as well.

After some discussion with the men from Yoosdarroch, who were more familiar with the territory about us, Mileff determined to push for the summit of Mount Sveti-Constantin, a considerable eminence which rises above the town of Navarrokop. It was so near to the headquarters of the *askares* that it would be the last place they would hit upon as likely to contain us. At the same time, it was arranged that one of the Yoosdarroch, men should find his way back to the village to have additional provisions sent to us as soon as possible. So much for our plans. But when Mileff turned to the old man whose injuries we had in some sort avenged, he shook his head dumbly.

"There is no use in returning to our home," the man said. "There would be worse after what has happened."

Mileff thought awhile. There was no denying the truth of the remark. That was the brutal fate of the revolution. The man who resented an injury suffered relentless persecution. Finally, the *voivode* asked him if he cared where his family went. He shook his head again.

"Then you had best go to Bukovo, which is not far from the frontier," decided the chief. "I will give you a letter to Yani Smirnoff there, and he will look out for you until there is a chance for you to get across the line. In Bukovo you will be safe."

Had Mileff known what he was bringing down on Bukovo by that message, I do not think he would ever have written it. So far as that goes, I suppose all of us would have

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quailed had we dreamed of the consequence of those few hastily scrawled words that the old man carried in his waist-sash. But, as is usual when one gambles with Fate, no knowledge of the future interfered to spoil our expectations.

We arrived on the summit of Sveti-Constantin about sunrise the next morning, and lay all the rest of the day in the thick undergrowth and bushes, listening to the busy life of the town below us. At the regular hours the *Ulemas* came out on the minarets of the mosques and sounded the call to prayers. Troops marched back and forth from the barracks to the drill-ground and paraded through the streets. Caravans of pack-ponies and ox-carts creaked in over the highroad. It was too good an opportunity to lose, and Mileff filled his time by sketching a comprehensive plan of the town and the surrounding country.

About noon a small party of peasants from Yoosdarroch came up with a donkey-load of provisions, and just before dusk we took up our march again, aiming for the village of Laeske, far away in the hills on the other side of the valley.

Having crossed one chain of mountains, we came to a succession of valleys lying between them and the next spur of the Rhodopes. There were Turkish outposts scattered all through these valleys, and the moonlight, which had become steadily stronger, was not friendly to our success. So the caution we employed was of the most painstaking sort. It appears laughable, now; but there was nothing humorous in it then. Orders were issued in whispers. We moved on tiptoe, taking care to step in one another's tracks whenever we walked on soft earth, and utilizing every rock or bit of grass-covered ground that offered, so that we might leave as dim a trail as possible.

Every bluff was scanned with Mileff's binoculars before we passed it, and several times we lay close to the earth, while the wailing yell of the *askare* sentries cut the loneliness of the night. And once, crouching in the shadow of a bold cliff, we looked across a moonlit valley at an opposite cliff which was crowned by a figure that moved uneasily from spot to spot. And now and then it wailed a long-drawn wolf-yelp that was answered by other wails in the distance. Our rifles covered him all the time, but the *askare* never knew how near he was to death.

IT WAS not until the third night that we reached Laeske, however, and after the usual council between the *voivode*, the priest, headman and elders, we left at nine o'clock the following night on the most formidable enterprise we had yet attempted—nothing less than a quick push through the Turkish military *enceinte* of Navarrokop to a second gap in the hills, in which lay the Bulgar-Turk village of Mushomista, but half an hour's march distant from the capital. Once more we were in the enemy's country; and once more we resorted to the tactics of the American forest-runners.

Now and then a militia sentry appeared from a tree clump or the shadow of a dyke, and before long the village of Mushomista twinkled before us on the hillside.

Mushomista is inhabited by both Turks and Christians, hopelessly intermixed. Our main reason for visiting it was to enable Mileff to get the mail that had come for him by revolutionary courier to Navarrokop, and on the afternoon of the next day the district militia chief, a peaceful photographer in ordinary life, dutifully delivered it, together with a large amount of tobacco for the *chetniks*, a gift which was by no means despised. Mileff immediately became absorbed in his letters from Sofia and in conversations with the photographer and other local leaders who had come in to see him. But for the rest of us the day dragged slowly. There was nothing we could do except smoke cigarettes. We could not even speak out loud.

So it was with a sense of genuine relief that some of us at a window spied a man in travel-stained attire toil up the main street at a lagging trot and knock on the gate of the courtyard below. Without knowing why, we sensed that there was to be a break in the monotony. There was a creaking and groaning as the great gate was pushed aside, and then the newcomer vanished, to reappear again a moment later in the door of our room. He was a young man, not more than twenty-five, and he had the straight figure and swinging stride of the mountaineer. Instinctively, his eyes sought Mileff; his hand clutched the doorpost, steadying his figure, which swayed with fatigue.

"I am of the Gherman militia," he began, panting for breath. "The *askares* are afield in the hills beyond Gherman. Yes-

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terday they burned the village of Krishvo, and *bashi-bazouks** took the little son of my neighbor Vakaroff and tortured him. We are helpless, *voivode!*"

The chief turned to our host, the schoolmaster of the village.

"Can you give us a guide to Gherman to-night?"

The messenger leaped to his feet.

"There is no need!" he cried fiercely. "I go with you! Do you think that a man of Gherman——"

"Yes, yes," replied Mileff, soothingly. "That is true. But we are a small party. An extra man will not harm. We shall take some militia in case we need help."

That night we repeated our exploit of the previous night; we pushed straight across the valley through the outlying Turkish lines, only this time we went even nearer to the town, once even scaling a section of the fortifications, so great was Mileff's contempt for the Turkish sentinels. Of that march two incidents stand out most distinctly in my mind. The first came just as we had halted for a brief rest, within sound of the noises of Navarrokop. We heard in front of us the clank of a rifle shifted from one arm to the other, and investigation disclosed a sentinel within stone's throw, whom the militiamen with us were strong for stabbing as he stood on his post. But Mileff refused to allow this, lest his dead body be found in the morning and revenge be taken on the nearest villages.

So we marched around him.

"There are plenty of Turks to kill beyond Gherman," Mileff told the bloodthirsty ones.

Half-way across the valley we were met by a militia patrol from Gherman, and they escorted us the rest of the march. It was almost sunrise when we stumbled into the village and wearily sought the resting-place allotted to us. We slept all that morning, and in the afternoon Mileff heard the reports of the depredations which had been recounted by the messenger. There was a long discussion afterward, and the upshot of it was that the villagers admitted that they didn't know much to speak of concerning the disposition of the Turkish troops. But before we could strike any effective blow it was necessary for the *voivode* to know exactly where the different *askare* detachments were placed, and Mileff announced that he was going to get this information for himself. He would go in disguise into the village of Dolan, where there was a small garrison, and see what he could find out concerning the commander's plans.

The *chetniks* were against this plan, for two reasons; first, because they knew it meant deadly danger for Mileff; and, second, because they could not share it with him. But Mileff had made up his mind, and that same afternoon he shaved off his beard, borrowed a peasant costume, and procured through the village committee a passport made out to one Constantine Ivanoff, carpenter and builder. With a young militiaman of Gherman for his sole companion, he started off immediately on his perilous venture, carrying in the voluminous sash that was part of his costume a sufficient dose of strychnine and an automatic revolver.

Andrea was left in command and, like the rest of us, he fretted miserably as the hours slowly passed and no news came from Mileff. It was two days before the message came, and then it was of the briefest. We were to meet him at eleven o'clock that night at a certain clearing on the mountain road from Dolan. Word had also been sent to Kortser to meet us with his detachment of the *cheta*. All the dispatch said in addition was that a party of *askares* would pass over this road in the early morning.

RIGHT after sunset we started, leaving the village by a back-door trail that dived into a ravine and kept us hidden until we were on the moor above the houses. At eleven o'clock, after five hours' marching, we knew we must be approaching the rendezvous. A little spring bubbled out of the rocks to the right of the road, and we took turns sucking up the water with our parched lips. As we were doing so some one hailed us from the shadows that barred the road, and Mileff and his guide stepped into the moonlight. I had always realized that the *voivode* was held in great affection by his followers, but I was surprised when they made a concerted rush for him. Laughing, he held up one hand to motion for silence, and the welcome was tended in whispers.

Having satisfied himself that our party was prepared to go into action, Mileff led the way to a glen beside the road where we

*Turkish irregular soldiers.

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seated ourselves in a circle about him, and he told his story. He had reached Dolan without any misadventure, and upon being shown before the Turkish commander of that place had confided that he was anxious because of the unsettled state of the country and desired to locate where he could be sure of protection from the various marauding bands. The *chetniks*, he said, were very dangerous men and terrible thieves. As the chief recounted this part of his story, the circle about him rocked in silent mirth.

Now, the *askare* commander was a kindly and well-meaning man, and he listened to Mileff's tale with attention, assuring him that he could safely come to Dolan.

"I am using great energy in repressing these *chetniks*," he said, "and my men are sparing no efforts to hunt them down, whenever it is possible. In fact, I am just preparing to dispatch a detachment of twenty men under an officer to Ossian to look for a band that has been reported in that neighborhood."

And that was why we were huddled in the heather by the roadside, waiting for Kortser. But Kortser did not come. We waited for two hours without any signs of him, and then we waited another hour, at the end of which period Mileff's patience was exhausted. We would fight the Turks without the assistance of the others, he said, and there was not a man among us who did not believe that we were fully capable of doing so, although the *askares* would be twenty-one against our twelve. But then, to be sure, we knew that we should have the advantage of position, and in guerilla fighting that means half the battle.

The clearing that we were on was an ideal place for a surprise, covered with fallen tree-trunks and tangled underbrush. Along its edge we constructed a series of rifle-pits, each large enough to contain one or two men, and so placed that the fire from one pit enfiladed that of another, and a body of men coming into their range would be subjected to a cross-fire. The pits were hollows scooped out of the ground with a bayonet, and reinforced by logs and small boulders. These, in turn, were masked by branches and scrub pines which we hacked down with our bayonets. My pit, in which I was alone, was about the center of the line and the farthest from the road. Andrea was stationed at the edge of the woods, and he was to give the *chetnik* call at the approach of the troops.

Our work finished, we lay in the pits to get what rest we could. I found my hollow very comfortable after the hours of hard marching. With a pile of fir boughs for a mattress and blanket, I fixed myself a luxurious bed, and despite the command that none was to sleep I am sure that I closed one eye. It is astonishing how easily one can mold oneself to the spirit of a new life. It was probably an hour or more later when I became aware of a sighing whisper that penetrated the air like the breeze quivering through the tree-tops. I had totally forgotten the signal, and only aroused to a sense of what it meant when Mileff's siren answered. The troops were coming.

I shook off the pine boughs that covered me, and dragged my rifle from its position inside my cloak, where I had placed it to protect the breech from the slight dew. I was ready. All I had to do was to loosen my revolver in its holster and unbuckle a compartment in my ammunition-belt, so that I could get at fresh clips of cartridges quickly. The night was perfectly still, except for the barking of a restless dog miles away in some hill village. In the east the sky was reddening faintly. The birds were still asleep, and it seemed strange that there was no noise—no noise at all in all the vast tract of country around us. Then I heard something creeping softly through the dimness of the night—the barely perceptible shuffling of feet in the dust of the road.

I DON'T remember that it made me excited. My one feeling was of exultation at the trap the Turks were walking into. I thought of the eleven other rifles, and of the lead-swept area of death they would create. I never had a doubt of the result of the fight. We would win. We could not——

At this moment the Turks debouched into the clearing, marching with rifles on their shoulders and bayonets fixed. There were five sets of fours, besides an officer on horseback and a brace of pack ponies which trailed after the column. The *askares* marched on unsuspectingly at the steady, plodding gait which has carried the Crescent to the gates of Vienna in its day. As they came opposite his pit in the center of

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the clearing, Mileff shouted to them in Turkish. I do not know what he said. It did not matter. It was simply the signal for us to shoot.

The brushwood that fringed the little plateau seemed to spit fire! The flashes darted vengefully from behind bushes, boulders and tree-trunks. I worked my gun as fast as I could pull the lever and eject the empty shells. As I fired the fifth cartridge, I saw the *chetniks* leaping from their coverts on either hand. I jumped to my feet at the same time. I was intoxicated with it all—with the pungent smell of the powder, and the wild, savage delight in killing, which must come from some primeval strain in the deeps of our being.

To my left, Andrea, Peter and Mileff, charging on the knot of paralyzed *askares*, struck up the stirring "Makedonsky March."

It was a wonderfully dramatic picture in the half-light of the dawn. Six or seven bodies sprinkled the ground, the result of our first volley. The Turks were beginning to fire wildly and the bayonets glinted cruelly as we charged. None of our men was hit, for the *askares* were panic-stricken, with two exceptions.

The officer was shot through the shoulder, but he shifted his sword to his left hand and ran at us, yelling crazily. I did not recognize his words at the time, but afterward I came to the conclusion that he must have shouted the old, old battle-cry of Islam: "Allah-Al-lah-il-il-Allah!"

Ilia pistoled him as he ran. Another *askare* sprang forward after his officer. He came at me, his long Mauser leveled. My rifle was empty; it was shorter in the barrel than his, and I realized that if he ever reached me it would be his game.

But my revolver was swinging loose from my neck by a halyard, and I grabbed for it. At least, I reflected, I'd get seven shots at him. Just as I raised it to shoot, I heard a cry of warning, and Andrea leaped between us. My bullet went over his head.

Without pausing to raise his rifle to his shoulder he fired at the Turk from the hip. It was a splendid shot, and Andrea made it certain by meeting his foe full-tilt. They went down in a kicking heap, and for an instant, as I circled round with revolver poised, I thought the *askare* had contrived to get his bayonet into my comrade. But Andrea rose unhurt, and the Turk lay still.

The fight was over! Eleven Turks were scattered over the little plateau—all dead, of course, for no prisoners were taken—and the rest had fled. We dared not wait to pursue them, not even to spoil the bodies. Five minutes after the first shot had been fired we were tramping over the mountains. Such wounds as were distributed among us, slight cuts and bruises from musket butts, were bound up as we marched.

Never halting, we pushed on until well into the morning, following no particular trail, but moving as the bird flies, straight across mountain and valley. About ten o'clock, as we were threading our way along the forest-covered slope of a mountain, the ringing blows of axes on standing timber floated up to us from the valley below. Here was something to be investigated, and we halted in a thicket, while Andrea and the guide went forward to reconnoiter. For an hour we lay shivering on the cold ground, awaiting the return of the scouts. At last they crept back to report that the axmen were *bashi-bazouks* of the Dolan garrison, a wood-cutting detail.

The party was not quite so big as ours, but its members were strewn the length of the valley, making it impossible to attack them all effectively at once. On the other hand, there was only one path out of the valley for mules laden with timber, and we bivouacked in the woods beside this trail to wait until the *bashi-bazouks* should start for home. It was a chance too good to be lost, and Mileff thought that a second blow, coming so soon after the first, would make a more lasting impression upon the mind of his whilom friend, the Turkish commander at Dolan.

In the meantime the sun came out warmly, and we found a few scraps of food in our knapsacks, which were greedily devoured. Sentinels were posted near the trail, and the rest of us took a nap. It was not a long one, however, for shortly before three o'clock the sentry nearest the road ran in to report that the wood-cutters were on the march. I was ready, save for adjusting my knapsack; but at the last minute the thing showed a tendency to slip and I was delayed while I tightened a strap. Consequently I was the last man into position, and as I emerged on the edge of the road, Andrea, next in line, signaled violently to me to drop in my tracks. I did so, unlocking the hammer of my Mannlicher as

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I sank amidst the heather. My bayonet was fixed.

It was a beautiful October day. There was a keen snap in the air, and the sun shone brightly to compensate for it. The birds sang all about us, and the mountains ringed the horizon like banks of blue mist. The *chetniks* had disappeared from sight, but I knew that they stretched in a long line on my right toward the entrance of the clearing.

Suddenly a dab of color, a green and red turban, showed in the opening of the bushes through which ran the trail, and behind it came other garish headdresses. Above them projected long Martinis or Mausers. I heard the first man call back to one in the rear, and a laugh answered him. Like an echo came the "*pahl*" of a rifle. The line of *chetniks* leaped to their feet from the shrubbery, and the rocks reverberated with the cracking of their Mannlichers.

The *bashi-bazouks* screamed in terror, and one or two fired their rifles, for I distinguished a different tone in the firing. I saw one man topple over like an empty flour-sack hit with a stick, and another ran about yelling hideously, with an arm hanging limply as if it did not belong to him. Mileff leaped on him fiercely, the *voivode's* bayonet flashed—and it was all over.

The remainder of the *chetniks* broke their line and rushed at the fleeing *bashi-bazouks*, singing the "Chant of the Chetniks." Now and then they stopped to fire, and a squad searched the undergrowth carefully to make sure there were no wounded seeking cover. They found one poor fellow, but he was dead.

Having accounted for the enemy's casualties, the *voivode* whistled loudly for the men to come in. They returned reluctantly; their blood was up, and they would have followed the *bashi-bazouks* to Dolan had they been allowed. But they had to be satisfied with what they had done; it would not be soon forgotten by the Turks. And so we felt quite cheerful as we started across the hills toward Kovatchavishta, which was once more our objective. It was five hours' march away, and we knew that they would be five hours of as rapid marching as our feet could stand, but the *chetniks* were the happiest men imaginable. The whole line, as it leaped from rock to rock or grass-plot to grass-plot, never leaving a footprint to help the trackers who would be on our trail in a few hours, hummed gaily the little revolutionary songs the people sing in the cafés in Sofia.

(*The conclusion of Mr. Smith's adventures will be found in the next issue of* ADVENTURE)

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A Libel by Force

by John L. Mathews

WE WERE all sitting around a table in the cosy quarters of the Transportation Club in San Francisco—Bucklen, who had led the rush to Herschel Island; Larrigan, who had ridden with Michael Davitt through three British camps in three successive nights to carry a message to Cronje; Nolan, who had never confessed to an adventure, and myself, who had never had one. Bucklen had been talking of the wild days under the Arctic sun, the frantic rush, the bitter disappointment, the heart-breaking return up the McKenzie and over the divide to the Yukon—and so to Dawson, when life was despaired of.

The mention of Dawson aroused Nolan, who was brooding over his coffee. He looked up thoughtfully, and waited for Bucklen to finish.

"I never saw Dawson," he said when Bucklen was done. "But I delivered my passengers there."

"What passengers?" we demanded.

And then Bucklen, calling the waiter, ordered some benedictine all round.

"Nolan's first story," he said. "It will be liqueur to the other tales."

Nolan smiled, drank the last of his coffee and pushed the cup away from him. And then, to our amazement and delight, he broke his long silence and dug up, from unexpected depths, the story of his adventure.

IT WAS six years ago—in the time of the first rush to Dawson. The news had come out at the close of a season and all the world was crazy to go in the first thing in the Spring. All the riffraff, all the toughs, all the sure-thing gamblers, all the professional road men, flocked into the Northwest and sought some way to get into the new bonanza. Literally thousands of them, at the first opportunity in Spring, went in over the White Pass and by the various difficult routes over the southern mountains to the Yukon. But a lot of them, wiser, less ambitious for the mountain climb, or eager to carry in more than they could freight in from Skagway, waited for a boat to take them to the Yukon.

Nothing was further from my mind than to be mixed up in such a movement. I had just taken over a clay deposit in southern California and was getting ready to work it when, out of a clear sky, came what seemed a fine offer for my services as supercargo on a ship which was to load for St. Michaels.

In fact, I was to be more than that; I was to take over the whole business of advertising, of selling passages, billing freight, and collecting the freight charges, part in advance and part on delivery in Dawson. In other words, to get the cargo and the passengers and make all arrangements for the trip.

The company was a new one, unincorporated, and bore the name "Puget Sound and Klondike Steamship Company." Its headquarters were in Seattle, its officers lived there, and it had already got out magnificent folders showing a whole fleet of ocean and river ships flying the company's flag.

That ought to have scared me off at the start; but as I was to get ten per cent. of the

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receipts I felt that I had authority enough to control my end of the business, and went up to look them over. I was a little wary of the members of the company, but as they had good references I decided to go in. Their plan was to charter a coastwise steamship, get her off at the first break of the ice in Behring Sea to St. Michaels at the mouth of the Yukon, and then to carry the passengers and freight to Dawson on shallow-draft stern-wheel steamboats.

That sounds easy enough to you fellows, but at that time the Pacific Coast had been swept clean of available vessels, safe or unsafe, and all the cheap and rotten vessels of the wornout fleet on the Atlantic were being rushed around Cape Horn, to be chartered for Alaska if they chanced to outlive the long journey.

No price was too high even for the worst of these, and the lives of the voyagers were to be risked without hesitation. The Puget Sound company had secured a charter on a fine big coaster at the very start, but her owner had had a better offer, and had cancelled the charter, leaving them to sue if they wanted to.

The best they could get was a small wooden steamer called the *Lula*, which might have carried comfortably twenty first-class passengers, and 1,500 tons of freight, and which the owner covered over during the early Spring with temporary houses stretching fore and aft, with two long alleys the whole length between them. Half a dozen cabins remained, which were allotted to the officers and myself. We were to sell second-class tickets at $350 each, entitling the bearer to sleep in his own blanket on the floor of one of these sheds and to eat at the common table. The entire passage to Dawson had to be paid in advance.

For the Yukon River the company had contracted with a firm in New England to build in Puget Sound three stern-wheel, shallow-draft wooden steamboats suitable for the Alaskan river. These boats were to be delivered at St. Michaels where they would be paid for in currency—$65,000. They were then to be sold at Dawson, when freight and passengers had been delivered, for $90,000. No price was too high for vessels on the Yukon that first year of the Dawson rush.

Of course, the greatest chance was in delivering these boats at St. Michaels. They would go up the inside passage, but a very slight storm in the long run out to Dutch Harbor would put an end to them.

I settled down in Seattle and began to get out advertising and make contracts for freight and sell passenger tickets. As the weeks went on, however, my first suspicions increased and if I had not been pretty deeply involved I should have got out. I decided to investigate, and one day took the bookkeeper to lunch.

"How much are they paying you?" I asked, when he was comfortably filled up.

"Seventy-five a month."

"I'm paying you one hundred and fifty," I said. "Bring me a complete transcript of all accounts and papers necessary to show what they are really doing; who is putting up all the money they are risking; in fact, everything to put me wise."

He grinned and nodded. "I could do that now," he said, "but you'll believe it easier when you see the figures!"

IT WAS a week before he came to my hotel and showed them to me. They made a fine exhibit. Here was a careful but very crooked gang that had worked out a general scheme for swindling. It had no real intention of carrying out the contract for ship and boats at all. When the money was paid in and it was time to make the first payment on the charter they would grab all the funds and run away with them. They had an old man named Bodfish, down in Maine, who had furnished all the capital and was supposed to get the big end of the profits. All the real money invested was his; and it would all be buried in the smash when the passengers and shippers realized that they were defrauded. For the old man the gang had no worry at all; he was to be the goat.

I saw my own course very clearly. I had three interests to protect; old man Bodfish, so that he would not be swindled; the passengers and shippers who had paid up, so that they would get their passage; and myself, so that I would keep out of jail. They had already dipped deeply into Bodfish's purse.

At the gang's suggestion—and I could see now that it fell in as nicely with their scheme as it did with mine—I had kept a separate account in my own name in which was deposited all the money I had collected. I drew this in currency, packed up all the outfit of my office including tickets, bills of

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lading, advertising and accounts, and went over the line into Canada with them, leaving the bookkeeper to keep me wise to the doings in Seattle.

I set up an office in Vancouver, sent out word to all ticket holders and shippers that the steamer would sail from there, and got out new advertising with that address. Most of the money, I put in a safe-deposit vault and kept a small account in my name in a bank. Then I wrote to Bodfish and told him the whole story, illustrated with a choice array of figures. He sent me at once a general power of attorney and instructions to do whatever seemed best to me to protect his interests.

Of course the firm in Seattle were at the boiling-point; but they kept their tempers under control, pretended this was all their doing, and cast about for some way to beat me out of the money. They tried to get away with the charter of the ship, but they lacked ready money to do it. The charter called for $10,000 cash on delivery of the boat and $30,000 more to be paid when she returned from the trip to Seattle. I notified the owners to deliver her to me for loading at Vancouver, and assured them that the cash was in hand there; and then went ahead collecting freight.

I felt very chipper when the *Lula* finally arrived at Vancouver, but had I known the character of the Captain and crew and the secret deal put through by the Seattle office with the owner and the Captain, I might have been more cautious and less jubilant.

I had, by this time, more than $140,000 in the deposit-box and the bank-account. I paid the Captain $10,000 for the charter, and put $90,000 in currency into a satchel, having to pay $65,000 for the three river boats at St. Michaels, and the balance being for wages, fuel and other expenses of delivering the cargo at Dawson. I would get it all back there when I delivered the stern-wheelers to their buyer.

The *Lula* had about 500 tons of freight for Dawson, much of it belonging to the passengers and charged for all the way from five dollars to ten dollars per hundred pounds to the Klondike. I had also put in her nearly 300 tons of coal, which would bring bonanza prices up there. There were a lot of general trading stores, and several traders were going up with us.

The stern-wheelers had gone on ahead. They had about four weeks start on us, and were traveling under their own steam. I expected that if the ice cleared away in time they would get into St. Michaels a full week ahead of us. They were to stay in port in rough weather and to run as fast as possible on smooth days. My firm wanted to tow our boats behind the *Lula* so as to get them there on time, but I was afraid to take the risk of carrying those little flat boats out across the open Pacific.

I had no such sentiment, however, about other people's boats, and as there was another good-sized stern-wheeler to go up, and the owner wanted her towed, I took the job for the *Lula* at $5,000, paid in advance; thus laying the foundation for more trouble for myself. At last the time came for the break-up of the Behring ice, and there was a simultaneous rush of steamships for the Yukon. We were the first out.

I wish you chaps could see that lot of passengers. You could search the world over and not find a finer set of all-round ruffians. I did not doubt my sailing from Canada had a great deal to do with this, for there were certainly more than a hundred of them who would never dare show their faces in Seattle. I would not have wagered on the honesty of ten out of the whole crowd, and the officers and crew of the ship could not be distinguished from them.

We were not long at sea before I became aware of two things that gave me uneasiness: first, it became evident that the whole shipload knew about the money I was carrying; and, second, the Captain and the mate evidently had it in for me and were setting the crowd against me for a purpose. The Captain went about telling the passengers that the whole thing was a swindle; that there were no stern-wheelers; that the boat towing astern belonged to some one else and was the only one going north that year. They would be dumped at St. Michaels without funds, and without any way in or out. I was to drop them there and scoot back to the United States. Then he artfully added that I had all their money in my satchel, and the only way to get it was to take it.

ALL this came to me by degrees, but I did not for quite a while get the full force of it. The Captain told me that the whole shipload was after me and that he was trying to protect me.

"You put that money in the office safe," he said, "and I'll see that it is taken care of."

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I reckon he would, too, all right. But I kept it in my own charge, and when things got bad I sat in my cabin with two guns in my hands and bribed a steward to bring me some grub.

What would have happened had I had to make that journey without aid, I leave you to guess, I should not be telling the tale now. But by good luck old George Livingston was on board, as sturdy a friend as I ever had. You have all heard of George. In the old days he was on the trails year in year out. I saw him when he bought his ticket, but said nothing to him then; but after we were well out he came up and shook hands and we talked over old times. So when this trouble began to brew, and the crowd kept pushing around looking for a chance to gun me, old George came in and sat down on my bunk.

"Billy," he said, "this here gang, the ship's crew, the officers and all the passengers are after that wad of money you got in your grip. They say you got an even hundred thousand. Captain Moles has been blabbing around."

"I got it," I said, "but I'm sitting on it."

"You're in a bad fix," he said, "but I'll try to pull you through. You and I been pals before this. I ain't going to see you robbed. I got fourteen good men aboard this ship, every one with a Winchester and at least two guns. We reckon on getting a good share of the gold-dust when it starts out for civilization from the Klondike, but we don't aim to take civilized money from our friends. I want to say that I have sounded the boys and we are all with you and if any galoot tries to rush this cabin he won't last to his second yell."

I got up and shook hands with him.

"Bully old George!" I said.

The little stern-wheeler we were towing added to my troubles. The Captain was against towing her from the start, and made violent protest. He declared it handicapped him in the race. It made the passengers believe that they might lose out in the race, even if they were carried through, because of this dragging boat. At last there came a head sea and the boat began to pound hard into it. I urged him to slow down and ease up the strain on the line, but he kept on full speed. So the little stern-wheeler, diving in the sea, gradually broke in her temporary boarding forward, opened her seams, and settled in the water. In about two hours she sank, the mate cutting the towline as she went down.

It was like gasoline upon a fire. The Captain made it clear to those ruffians that even if this had not been the only boat (as it was, he said) the others would share the same fate and could not possibly arrive at St. Michaels. They surged about my cabin, demanding their money back, cursing, shouting, knives and revolvers in hand and threatening to cut me to pieces if I did not give my money up.

I had my guns out and was ready to fire if they hit the door, when I heard George outside and the crowd getting still. I opened the door. Two of George's men stood sentry on either side. George himself faced the crowd, and at his feet lay a big, powerful Swede who had led the mob, felled by a single blow from George's fist.

WHEN we reached the Aleutians, I hoped to have sight of our river boats, but there was no sign or report of them. We were in an armed peace, two of George's men always on guard, and the crowd, drunk on the ship's liquor, more and more riotous. The Captain came to my room, demanded the balance of the charter money and said that unless I paid it he would seize the ship, with passenger and freight list, and take my money as well. I had a copy of the charter and it did not require any payment; but the Captain produced an order from his owners, countersigned by the Seattle gang, ordering him either to get the money or to take possession. Evidently my employers had gone in cahoots with the owner.

As we approached the Yukon the deck was in a continuous uproar, a ceaseless riot, and it was certain they would throw me overboard at the first chance. Even old George began to get worried.

"Billy," he said, "if, when you get to St. Michaels, those three dinky little boats are there, you will be all right. But if they ain't there, nothing in God's earth can save you but the United States Army. I got fourteen men, but if them ships ain't there, even they ain't going to hold on long; and we got to fix up a plan for you to get away with your money."

"I have a plan," I said. "There's an army post there. You fix it so I can get over the side. I'm going to take the Captain and the mate for hostages and maybe

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that big fat man that's so noisy around here and has the biggest following."

"Good!" said George. "I'll tell the boys."

WELL—you know it was all daylight then, right in the middle of the Summer, and scarcely an hour when the sun was not in sight. We came up into the Yukon and all those unruly ruffians we had on board kept to the deck and scanned the river and the shore for the three little boats. As we came up toward the military station, where they were to meet us, the whole crowd got perfectly silent. Some of them got out their guns and fingered them.

I scanned the shore vainly for the fleet. My heart went down in my boots. For the first time I was afraid they were lost. I had made sure they would be waiting there—they got such a long start.

When we were in full sight of the anchorage the whole gang saw there were no boats. The Captain came out on the bridge over their heads and swept the horizon with his hand and yelled at them.

"Now, —— you!" he shrieked. "I told you so! You are a pack of fools, to be taken in by that swindler. Where are the river boats? Not a one was ever built! Go to it now, and get your money back!"

On the heels of his words there was a terrific yell from that crowd, and then down the two alleys between the houses they came rushing, knives and guns in hand, shrieking, cursing, like a lot of mad men. It was a stampede, and the Captain, the mate and the crew were in it.

I was gone, for sure. I had two long forty-fives in my hands, and stood there in front of my door as they started down my alley about one hundred and fifty feet forward. Before I could begin firing there was a sharp yell right over my head, two rifles cracked and a couple of men dropped to the deck. The crowd in front stopped and shoved back. Guns and knives fell to the deck and hands went in air. The riot was checked in an instant. I looked up and there were Old George and half his men—the rest were guarding the other alley—their Winchesters trained on the crowd, ready to sweep through the solid ranks of them. Something about those long rifles awed the mob as no pistols could have done.

Well, you know, you can't hold a crowd like that long. George sent a couple of men up each alley and drove them all back to the open deck at the bow. We were up to the anchorage now, and he made the Captain take charge, ring down the engines and let go the anchor.

The vessel swung to the hook. Fortunately for our plans, most of the small boats were stowed aft of the sleeping-houses. With old George holding the crowd in check I went forward and, gun in hand, collected three of the crew, Captain Moles and the mate, and the big fat man who had been stirring up trouble. I took my grip with the money in it in my left hand, and with my gun in my right sticking into the paunch of the fat man I retreated down the alley.

"Come aft now, and get out a boat!" I shouted.

Captain Moles and the men I had picked came slowly, their legs trembling, scarcely able to advance in the face of the Winchesters. But they came, and put a boat over, and set a ladder down to it.

"Now get down in it!" I said.

They went down and one of George's men searched them for weapons as they went over the side. All the time I stood there with the gun in the paunch of the fat man and his hands in the air, ready to pull the trigger at the first hostile move.

"Now you come along!" I said to him.

He came, and at the rail I made him stand facing the crowd, as a shield to the ladder, while I climbed over the rail and descended.

The stern of the boat was in place for me, and I stepped in, one of the rifle men covering the crew until I was seated. Then the crew took the oars, and I sat there with my satchel between my feet, and both guns in my hands urging them on.

You never had a ride like that. It was a mile up to the landing, and all that mile Captain Moles, shielded by the men, cursed and reviled and threatened me. I let him go on uninterrupted. Black looks, open threats, predictions of later vengeance, and frequent declarations of what they would do to my satchel, occupied the whole time of the voyage, but the cowards kept on rowing, and at last drove the prow of the boat upon the shore.

"Now," I shouted, "get up and step out, slowly, and in orderly fashion, one man at a time! Captain, you go first and stand still till the rest are out."

I was afraid they would make a concerted rush and shove the boat out. They went

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out one by one, however, and when they were all ashore I fired a couple of shots at their heels to accelerate their departure.

Captain Moles did not hesitate as to his course. He sprinted to the office of the United States Commissioner to carry out his threat to libel and seize the ship. I hastened in a different direction, to the headquarters of the military post's commanding officer. The Captain in charge heard my quickly-told story, looked at the money in my satchel, locked it in his safe, set a guard upon it, and then, without a moment's delay, told off twelve men and a sergeant to go out and take possession of the *Lula*.

George's men were still standing guard, and after the soldiers relieved them they offered to remain to assist in guarding the ship, but we brought them ashore and left the troops in charge.

When we returned to the shore with them Captain Mole and the Commissioner were awaiting us with the libel and a warrant for my arrest.

"They're no good in this military post," said the Commandant; "I've got twelve men aboard ship, and that's a good enough libel for me. This man Nolan is under my protection."

The things the Commissioner and Captain Moles threatened to do at Washington would have kept a whole group of politicians busy; but we left them talking. I went to the post and turned in for a wink of sleep—the first in forty-eight hours. I had not had more than one hour in twenty-four during the last half of the trip. It seemed now that I had barely closed my eyes when the Commandant came noisily in to arouse me.

"Here's your river boats, Nolan!" he shouted.

And sure enough, when I had rubbed my eyes open and made my way to the open air, there were the three stern-wheelers, flags flying, crews cheering, paddling and coughing noisily up to the landing.

THE effect on the ruffians aboard our ship was astounding. The first to discover the approaching fleet raised a shout, and in a moment hats were off, and the whole crowd, which but a few hours before had been trying to take my life, was yelling and cheering in the best good humor over the unexpected arrival. Passage to Dawson was assured them, and their troubles were ended.

But between Captain Moles and myself there was an unending feud. Our affairs demanded urgently a prompt settlement. We invited the Commissioner and his client to the post, therefore, and the Commandant acted as arbitrator.

In the end we made a fair settlement. I made over the trading cargo, the coal, the passenger list, the freight list, and the three little boats to Captain Moles for his owners. He, in turn, gave the builder who had come up on the stern-wheelers an order on the buyer at Dawson for $65,000 and free passage up and back on the boats. He gave me $10,000 cash and an order on his owner for $35,000.

That cleared us all up. He hired the crew that brought the stern-wheelers up, put the freight on board, sold the coal at a bonanza price to his own owners, sent the mate up as commander on the Yukon, and sailed away for Seattle.

I offered George any part of my capital for his services, but he would not take a cent. He may have had a plan for getting the owner of the fleet on his return trip with his sixty-five thousand. At any rate, we said farewell, and I caught a faster ship which had followed us in and reached Vancouver a day before Moles landed the *Lula* in Seattle.

I came back with my money intact, deposited the order for $35,000 for collection, and put the rest in the vault.

"AND what then," we demanded. "How did it end?"

"Oh, well; I figured out all the accounts with the aid of the bookkeeper. I sent old man Bodfish all his money with interest. Then I took out my commission, put the rest of the money, the claim for $35,000 and the whole business generally, in the hands of the court, and sent word to the gang in Seattle that it was theirs to fight over. They are still fighting, I believe, and there are about ten volumes of records in the Federal courts. But my end of it came out clean and clear. I delivered the passengers, paid up Bodfish, and got my percentage. I was entirely content to close in that way the only real adventure I have had."

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The Usurper

by W. Robert Foran

FOR several years the fierce hill tribe of the Nandi, who inhabit the territory north of the Uganda Railway and south of Lake Baringo in British East Africa, had proved a deep thorn in the side of the British Government. They had committed murder after murder and had raided with impunity the peaceful neighboring Kavirondo tribe to their hearts' content. The main blame for these lawless attacks was justly laid at the door of their powerful king, old El Mbatian.

Young Montague Hardy, who was the District Commissioner in charge of the vast Nandi territory with headquarters at Muhoroni, had proved powerless to stop the fierce raids of this war-like nomadic tribe. He had appealed in vain to the Government to send a punitive expedition against the hillmen; but at last a series of brutal murders of his poorly armed native police had stirred the Governor of the Colony to action. Captain Ralph Weatherby, of the King's African Rifles, was sent with his company of Sudanese soldiers and a maxim gun to reinforce the small police garrison at Muhoroni. He had orders to assist Hardy as far as possible in checking these restless marauders. If he was unable to cope with the disorders, the Governor promised the early despatch of a regiment of native infantry to punish and subdue the hillmen thoroughly.

Weatherby had been camped at Muhoroni for a week and no untoward incident had disturbed the serenity of the post. Hardy began to breathe freely again and promised himself that the presence of the military was having the desired effect.

The two men sat one day after lunch in the little dining-room of Hardy's wood and iron bungalow, smoking cigars and sipping some very old liqueur brandy. The room was simply furnished with plain but serviceable wooden tables and chairs. The floors were covered with reed matting, with here and there a leopard-skin and the skins of lions to relieve the monotony. On the walls hung a number of heads, tokens of the chase. In the corners of the room some native spears and shields betokened days spent in other sections of the country. Near the door was a rack containing a varied assortment of sporting guns and rifles. It was a typical African official's room.

The heat of the equatorial sun had driven all nature to rest and there was hardly a sound to be heard, except the steady tramp of the native sentry outside the bungalow. The rugged rocky face of the huge Nandi escarpment frowned down upon them, scintillating in a thousand changing colors under the rays of the powerful midday sun. The whole countryside was bathed in gorgeous golden hues and the two men gazed with admiration upon the scene dis-

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closed before their eyes through the open windows.

Weatherby was the elder of the two and looked the born leader of men. Tall, with deep-set, broad shoulders, fair hair and mustache, and a face tanned to a deep red-brick color by the many years he had spent in Africa's tropical suns, he looked what he was, the typical English army officer, one of the kind who have so unobtrusively built up the great British Empire.

You can see them everywhere, doing their country's work without flourish of trumpets. In India, in the Sudan, in Egypt, and in fact in every corner of the world where the Union Jack waves, these strong, silent men, fighters all, do a man's work and take daily risks of which the world never even hears. You would have set Weatherby down as a man of forty, but thirty would have been nearer the mark. Men age rapidly in Africa.

On the other hand, Hardy was lean and slim of build. He was barely twenty-five. His face was lined and his hair prematurely gray at the sides. He had the appearance of a man who is accustomed to look death squarely in the face without flinching. His superiors knew his sterling worth as an administrator and ruler of large territories and tribes, and this was the reason he had been given the difficult Muhoroni district. Responsibility seemed to sit lightly on his young shoulders, if his animated face was any criterion. Here was a young man, but a few years graduated from Cambridge University, master of a country in size the equal of Kansas and Missouri and ruler over a tribe numbering little less than a hundred thousand souls; and yet when he went to England on his hard-earned vacation he was pointed out as the "man who was something or other in Africa."

HARDY leaned over the table toward Weatherby. His face had a dreamy far-away look. His hands gesticulated nervously.

"You can't tell, Weatherby, how I have hoped that the Governor would send up some of you soldier men to give me a chance to make good," he remarked earnestly. "Think of it, man! For a year I have sat idle here, powerless to do anything, while that scoundrel, El Mbatian, has worked his sweet will. I have seen man after man of my little command murdered in the most barbaric fashion, and have not been able to lift a finger to save them or punish their murderers. It is all very well for the Governor to sit in his easy and comfortable office at Nairobi and dictate a letter to one of his secretaries bidding me wait and do the best I can.

"I know my Nandi well by this time and recognize that the only way to stop this raiding is to capture that old limb of Satan, El Mbatian. Honestly, I would give a year's pay cheerfully to have the old brute safely under lock and key! I know that this is the only way to civilize these hillmen. Without their King, who is also their Medicine Man, the tribe would be powerless. Yet, how am I to capture him?"

Hardy rose restlessly from his chair at the table and walked over to the window. He gazed silently out toward the hills of the escarpment which guarded the Nandi country.

Weatherby got up from the table and joined him. He laid his hand on Hardy's shoulder, patting it in sympathy.

"I know how you feel, old chap. We all know what an unfair position you have been placed in. However, let's think of some scheme for bringing this wily savage to book. Got any plan to suggest?"

Hardy turned round and looked keenly at Weatherby.

"In a way I have, but I hardly like to mention it. It's too confoundedly risky. However, you had better judge for yourself as to its merits. You know more about this sort of thing than I do."

"Let me hear it." answered Weatherby. "We should both score heavily for promotion if we could bring in the King without the expense of a large punitive expedition. You know how adverse the Governor is to fighting. That's all very well in its way, but fighting is all the natives understand. You know as well as I do that they deem kindness a sign of weakness. Brute strength is the thing that counts with them. Poor devils, they were born and raised on fighting, so how should they know otherwise?"

Hardy seated himself on the window-ledge. "My plan is simple enough but it will require a superabundance of nerve to execute it. You remember the Nandi warrior your reconnaissance patrol brought in yesterday? I have been talking to him and he is in mortal funk of being put to death by torture. The poor devil thinks we

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shall treat him as his fellow tribesmen do their prisoners. Maybe we can persuade him to lead a party to the King's village at night and show us the hut he occupies. A nervy man could crawl into the hut and rap the old brute over the head, bind him, and carry him off as a prisoner before the enemy were aroused.

"El Mbatian lives at a village less than ten miles from here. However, I can't go. My orders are too positive not to leave my post under any consideration. That puts the hat on it for me, and, oh,—— it all, man! I can't ask any one else to go. It's too beastly risky. Certain death and torture if one fails. The Nandi are past masters in the art of torture, too. Heavens, what a comedy, though, if we could announce to the Governor that the tribe was submissive and the King in captivity!"

Weatherby rose eagerly from his chair. "By the Lord Harry! You have hit the nail on the head. Anything to relieve the monotony of sitting still here waiting for the Nandi to attack. Besides, think of the chance for promotion if I succeeded!"

He commenced to stride excitedly up and down the little room.

"Let's send for the prisoner and tempt him with a dozen cows. He'll fall for that, certain," he announced suddenly.

HARDY called his orderly and gave instructions for the Nandi prisoner to be brought before them. In a short time the man was led into the room between two soldiers with fixed bayonets. He looked from one to the other defiantly, without speaking. He was tall and lithely built, his body being still covered with artistic designs in mud and oil. He was as naked as a new-born babe.

The two white men looked at him keenly. The savage bore their scrutiny unflinchingly. He threw his chest out and raised his head arrogantly.

"O Nandi warrior," began Hardy, in the man's own dialect, "I have sent for you to make an offer. I will give you your liberty and twelve cows if you will lead the white chief"—he pointed to Weatherby—"to King El Mbatian's hut in the hills. You must take him there to-night. If you do not consent, then your blood be on your own head, warrior, for you shall die!"

The warrior looked from one to the other, the light of cupidity in his eyes. There was silence for a time and then suddenly the man began to talk. The bribe of twelve cows had had the desired effect

"O great White Chief, Chief of all Chiefs, your offer seems good to this, your child. If you will promise me freedom and the cattle, and protection from the wrath of my people, then will I lead this white warrior to the hut of my King. It is not far from here and we can travel by the light of the moon. How many men will the white man take with him?"

He paused while the two white men conferred for a few minutes. Hardy informed him that Weatherby would take six soldiers.

"It is good, O Chief. The fewer the better. Silence and swiftness of foot must be the Chief's work to-night or else he will fail. I will be ready!"

Hardy waved his hand in token of dismissal and the prisoner was led back to the jail by his escort.

Weatherby's face plainly showed his elation at the successful outcome of the interview. Hardy was palpably nervous.

"The more I think of the plan the less I like it for you. I suppose it is too late to try and deter you, Weatherby?" he asked anxiously. "Supposing you fail. Have you thought of what that means?"

"Yes," answered Weatherby, cheerfully, as he lit a fresh cigar. "There will be no failure. And even if there is, I shall only be doing what I have always hoped and prayed that I might do—be killed in action. Believe me, Hardy, there is no better epitaph than that."

"I am full of misgivings, but I pray God you will succeed! I shall be ready to come to your aid, if necessary, but I shall hope there will be no need for that. Come, you had better select your men while I order dinner to be ready early. You will want to sleep a few hours. I will see that all is ready and that you are called in plenty of time."

Weatherby hastily called his company together and selected the six best men for the midnight adventure. They were all men who had fought through several African wars and could be thoroughly depended upon in any emergency. Then he went to his tent and cast himself on his camp cot for a brief rest. In a few minutes he was asleep.

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II

AT MIDNIGHT Weatherby called his men together and, with a silent grip of Hardy's hand in farewell, strode after his little band into the moonlight.

Hardy watched them disappear on the trail leading to the mountains, and then returned to his house to keep lonely vigil all night until he should hear tidings of the success or failure of the coup.

Weatherby marched steadily forward, ever and again inquiring the direction from the prisoner who was acting as guide. The only sounds were those of birds and the occasional distant howl of some prowling hyena.

Suddenly mysterious night-owl hoots were heard on either side of them. The calls became so insistent that Weatherby at last whispered to his men to halt and listen. He felt confident that these were no ordinary calls.

The guide whispered to him, in confirmation of his suspicions, that the Nandi were abroad and calling to one another. They could not see any one, yet the cries continued with great persistence and frequency. At times they sounded close at hand; and at others they receded until they were barely distinguishable. Weatherby waited for some time fully prepared for an attack, but, nothing happening, decided to push on. After a time, the hoots of the owls ceased as suddenly as they had begun. All was still again.

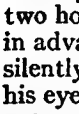
They had been marching for a little over two hours, when the guide, who was a little in advance of the party, halted. He pointed silently ahead of him. Weatherby strained his eyes through the night and finally made out a collection of dome-shaped mud and grass-roofed huts. It was El Mbatian's village and the object of their quest. Not a sound broke the death-like stillness of the night. The moon shed its rays brilliantly over the surrounding country and the Southern Cross slanted luminously across the heavens. They listened with every nerve on the alert to ascertain whether their presence had been discovered. It was a tense moment and full of thrills for the adventurous little band.

Weatherby signalled to them to advance, and they silently entered the village. A dog barked and they held their breath. Not a movement followed and Weatherby advanced farther into the village. The guide pointed out to him the King's hut. Instructing his men in a whisper to cover his advance with their rifles and to see to it that the guide did not bolt, Weatherby sank to his knees and started to crawl toward the hut of the King.

Arrived at the door, he hesitated for a moment, and then gingerly commenced to drag away the reed mat which covered the small entrance to the hut. Slowly, inch by inch, the door moved until the black cavity of the interior was revealed. Weatherby crept on his hands and knees into the hut. His men waited outside with bated breath and rifles ready for immediate action. Silence followed for a few minutes, and then there was a muffled curse and a stifled cry of alarm, quickly followed by the sound of a crashing blow. Again silence; and then the sound of something heavy being dragged along the ground.

Presently the anxious watchers saw Weatherby crawl backward out of the hut, dragging an inanimate body cautiously after him. Still no sound; the village had not been alarmed.

The soldiers and the guide drew near, and the latter identified the body of the native as that of El Mbatian. "So far, so good," thought Weatherby. They bound the old man securely with rope; and, as he slowly regained consciousness from the heavy, smashing blow Weatherby had dealt him on the head with the butt of his revolver, raised him to his feet. He looked with bewilderment upon his captors.



SUDDENLY a night-owl hooted close at hand! This was followed by a cock crowing lustily his welcome to the fast-approaching dawn. Another cock crowed, followed by another, until the whole village seemed to be alive with them. Sounds of people moving in the huts warned Weatherby that it was time to retire rapidly on Muhoroni. More night-owls hooted as they commenced to leave the village.

A native came out from his hut and stretched his arms lazily above his head. At first he did not notice the little party. Then suddenly he uttered a loud cry of alarm.

"——!" remarked Weatherby, soulfully, as he turned to face the village.

He ordered his men to make off with the prisoner as fast as they could while he cov-

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ered their retreat with his revolver. His men hastened to obey. They liked the look of the situation as little as did Weatherby.

In a second the village was teeming with natives aroused from their slumber by the alarm. Warriors, in nature's negligée, came bustling out of their huts, armed with their long, evil-looking spears and raw-hide shields. Step by step Weatherby retreated, covering the alarmed natives with his revolver. The enemy gazed upon the little band in speechless amazement. Then with a fiendish shout of rage they rushed toward Weatherby with their spears raised on high. It was a terrifying sight even in full daylight, but infinitely more so by the light of the moon.

Weatherby fired rapidly into their midst with his revolver, each shot from the six chambers bringing down a man. This halted them for a moment, giving him time to reload and draw his sword. Then they rushed toward him again, their spears flashing in the dying moonlight as they hurled them at him.

He felt a sharp pain in his side and then another in his left arm. He waited calmly, with his sword drawn in one hand and his revolver in the other, ready to sell his life dearly. His face was calm and undismayed. If he was to die, so be it! It should be a soldier's death and in accordance with the best traditions of the service.

A thought came to him to try a little diplomacy. He seized upon the chance like a drowning man clutching at a straw.

"Halt, O Nandi!" he thundered at them in their own dialect. "Advance another step and I'll kill your King!"

They stopped in their tracks momentarily and Weatherby breathed more freely. Blood was streaming down his side and arm, where the two spears had wounded him. The respite was brief. They came on again with increased fury. There was a sound of rushing feet and his men stood beside him ready to give their lives for him or die with him. They threw the body of the bound King at his feet. Volley after volley they poured into the advancing tribesmen with telling effect, checking their rush. The warriors halted again, hesitating to face this new death-dealing device of the white men.

Cutting the King loose hastily, Weatherby stood him upon his feet and pressed the still hot muzzle of his revolver to his head. "Tell them, El Mbatian, to retire and allow us to leave here unmolested," he commanded with grim determination, "or you pay forfeit with your life!"

The aged King, in a thin quavering voice, trembling all over with fright, did as he was ordered. The effect was instantaneous. The warriors stood still and watched the little group with angry and puzzled eyes. Their King was as a god to them and they could not afford to see him killed. Weatherby looked as if he meant to carry his threat into execution.

Again the intrepid little band commenced to retire. Weatherby led the old King by the arm and was followed by his men with their faces toward the enemy. But suddenly the warriors awoke to the fact that their King was being stolen in front of their very eyes. They rushed forward again with fierce yells and war-cries. There was a dull report as Weatherby placed his revolver to the old King's head and fired. The old man's legs crumbled beneath him and he fell lifeless at Weatherby's feet!

WEATHERBY turned to face the mob with his revolver. The Nandi uttered a howl of dismay as they saw their King fall dead. The women who had gathered in the background to watch the fight set up a shrill cry of lamentation.

"O Nandi," shouted Weatherby, "you see your King and Medicine Man dead. His magic was useless against the magic of the white man. Surrender now before it is too late, and the Balozi (White Chief) will not harm you."

He knew it was time to use all his powers at bluff, if he and his men were to come out of the adventure successfully. He strained all his efforts to impress upon the savages the fact that he was all-powerful. He was feeling faint and sick from loss of blood and his wounds were throbbing painfully. But he bravely continued to harangue the savages. "Throw away your spears, Nandi, and surrender to the Great White Chief. My magic is the most powerful in the world and I will be your Medicine Man and King henceforth. If you do not obey, many hundreds of white men will come with smoke-guns and kill you all. They will take all your cattle. What say you? Will you die or will you follow me in peace and plenty?"

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There was a sullen silence following this bold speech. The tribesmen whispered earnestly among themselves, then one by one the warriors threw down their spears and shields at the feet of their conqueror. The day was won.

An old Chief advanced timidly toward Weatherby with hand outstretched. He spat in the palm and shook Weatherby by the hand. This was the greatest possible honor he could pay to the white men, according to his tribe's custom.

"Great is the power of the White King, and great is his magic. Henceforward we are his slaves and he can do with us as he wills!" he sonorously announced.

Turning to the warriors he exhorted them to serve their new King with faithfulness and obedience. The warriors grunted their approval of his words.

Weatherby sheathed his sword and replaced his revolver in its holster. There was no further need for them. He looked round for the guide, but the latter had disappeared in the excitement of the fight. He was now nowhere to be seen.

"Bring grass and fire, Chief," he ordered. "You must burn your weapons, for henceforward I shall rule without war. The land will be guarded by smoke-guns. Spears are useless, as you see. You will be rich in cattle and your crops will be plentiful. I will heal your sickness. Come, follow me, for we will now go to the Boma (Government post) and confer with the other White Chief, my assistant."

The Nandi raised their hands above their heads in salute and signified their consent to follow out Weatherby's instructions by guttural shouts of homage. So did the King come into his own. He had usurped an African kingdom, killed the former ruler, and by sheer daring and nerve, acquired a vast new territory for the British Crown.

Having seen that the weapons of the Nandi were burning beyond hope of redemption, Weatherby ordered his new subjects to follow as he headed for Muhoroni. Four of the warriors carried the dead body of their former King on a shield behind him as they set out on their journey.

THE sun was creeping above the horizon as the procession came in sight of Muhoroni. The Nandi were chanting a melancholy song of honor, extolling the prowess and great beauty of their new King, as they followed Weatherby and his six grinning soldiers. The unusual sound awakened Hardy as he dozed over a book in his bungalow. He hastily came out into the open to investigate.

The sight which met his eyes made him rub them in astonishment. He thought he must be dreaming. In the van came Weatherby with his arm in a rough sling and his side bandaged. He was walking slowly and evidently in great pain. Behind him stretched a vast concourse of Nandi. As far as the eye could reach these savage black children of the jungles extended until they were lost in the tall thick grass of the plains.

Hardy raced forward with feelings of extreme relief and joy to greet the conqueror. He extended his hand in glad welcome as he neared Weatherby.

"Magnificent, old man!" he cried joyously. "This means your Majority and the Distinguished Service Order. How did you do it?"

"Majority be hanged! I am a King! I have usurped the kingdom of the great El Mbatian. The King is dead. Long live the King!"

Weatherby smiled happily, tottered, and fell unconscious into the arms of Hardy. His strength had lasted so far only by superhuman efforts.

He awoke toward midday to find Hardy standing over his cot, smiling good-naturedly at him. He had heard all about the happenings of the night from the six soldiers, and was hugely pleased.

"Will your Gracious Majesty permit your most humble and admiring servant to announce to you that His Excellency the Governor has humbly telegraphed his great appreciation of your midnight coup and that he has sent forward your name for promotion and the Distinguished Service Order? He will follow in person to-night to thank you."

Weatherby raised himself on his uninjured arm and gripped Hardy's hand as he smiled contentedly.

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THE COWARD

by Berton Braley

SAYS Alkali Ike, "Though it may be true
That bad men's eyes is a quiet blue,
An' their hands is small an' their voices low,
An' I got all of them marks to show,
Yet I hereby claim, depose an' state,
Reckon, declare, an' kalkilate,
That I am the peacefullest person here.
I says it loud an' I says it clear,
I'm the quietest, kindest, meekest guy
That ever was seen by the human eye."

Says Alkali Ike as he drunk a drink—
"Honestly, boys, I'm the ca'mest gink,
With the softest heart an' the kindest ways
Of any feller you'll meet these days.
I preaches peace an' I lives it—right;
I ain't no hand for a scrap or fight.
I'm so slow to anger there's folks who claim
That I got no honor or sense of shame;
They sees me lettin' things go so far
They reckon I'm cowardly——"
"And you are!"
Says the stranger, leanin' acrost the bar,
An' every one ducks, for it looks like war.

"I am!" says Ike, as he draws his gat.
"Well, mebbe I am, but I won't take that!"
"G'wan," says the stranger, "chuck it, scat!
I ain't no bad man, I got no gun,
Go on an' shoot, when the job is done,
They'll tell how yer brave young heart was steeled
To puncture a feller—that wasn't heeled."

Says Alkali Ike, "Why, durn my eyes!
Ye're dead right, friend. I apologize."
Then he peeled his coat an' his cartridge belt
An' he took off his guns an' his Stetson felt,
An' he says, "Though a person of peace I am
I'll fight you, stranger, yer own way."—*Bam!*
An' he hit that guy on his ugly chin
An' the stranger fell in a heap—all in.

Says Alkali Ike, "You have often heard
Of the Dove of Peace, well, I'm that bird!
Is there any doubt of the fact? What? No?
All right, let's licker. Here's to you, bo!"

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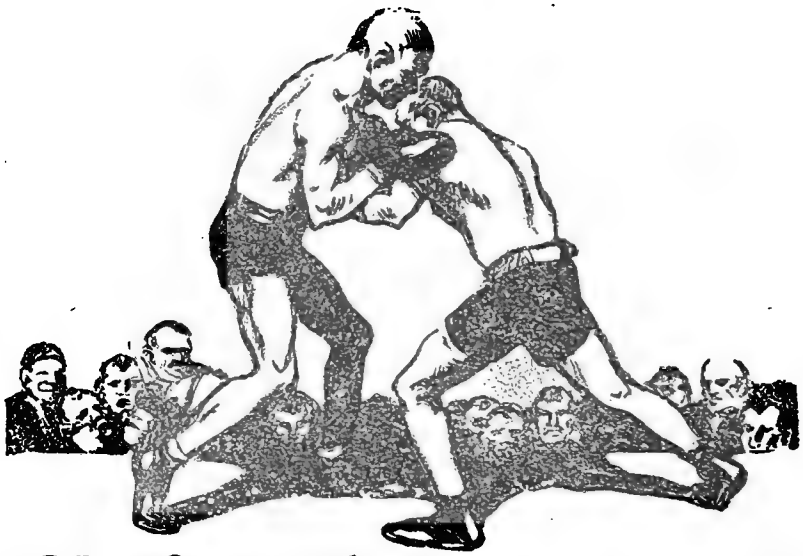

The Goner?

by Walter Galt

"BILLY BLAIN stood still at the southeast corner of Houndsditch and slowly fingered one shilling and a sixpence that constituted all his worldly goods. "——!" he grumbled. "Have I got to take to sellin' shoe-laces, same as Gunner Haviland?" It rather looked like it; for Billy could not make the light-weight limit any longer. He had weakened himself by starving and sweating off his weight in preparation for the last fight; the finish of that fight was still almost recent enough to be news, and Billy was not the only person who was thinking of it.

With the knock-out blow that laid him on the broad of his back in the middle of the fourth round had vanished Billy Blain's chance of winning the Lonsdale Belt, as well as Billy's livelihood. He had not had a square meal since that event, and men who had formerly been glad to drink at his expense and proud to slap him on the back now passed him by.

A man passed him now, walking westward. He nodded and winked at Billy, but hurried past, and as he did so he nudged his companion.

The companion turned and stared.

"Blain, isn't it?" he asked. "Blain it is," said the first man, not caring apparently whether Billy heard him or not. "Down and out, like the rest of them. Good fellow, you know, and all that kind of thing. Spent the money when he had it. Same old story, I suppose. Booze—didn't trouble to train properly—entered his last fight green as a Michaelmas goose—got licked, of course—never saved a penny—another goner!"

The two men had stopped to look at a window display, and Billy Blain heard every word they said. It hurt. It was true that he had been a good fellow according to his lights, and that he hadn't saved a penny; but booze had had nothing whatever to do with his downfall. The only alcohol he ever tasted had been gin, and he took that to stop his growth. But he grew and grew and grew, and his weight with it; and now, in spite of the hunger that gnawed continually, he was five pounds over weight.

"I'm a goner, am I?" growled Billy under his breath. "Maybe I am—not! Maybe I'll show 'em a thing or two yet. ——! But I gotter eat first!"

He went into a near-by steak-and-kidney-pudding shop, and when he emerged the shilling in his right-hand pocket had nothing left to jingle against.

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An hour later he walked into a public-house that stood at the corner of High Street, Putney, and the money in his pocket jingled again, for the fare down had cost him fourpence, and there was a sixpence and two pennies left.

"What's yours?" asked the barmaid haughtily. She, too, knew of Billy's downfall and had no use for "goners."

"I came down to see Mr. Doyle," answered Billy, with a smooth civility that was amazing from him.

"You can't; he's busy."

Billy laid one elbow on the bar and leaned across it.

"Go and tell him I'm here!" he snarled. "Throw your weight about, now! I didn't come here to bandy arguments wi' you. It's not my style! Go and tell him!"

The girl stared open-mouthed. Even in his palmy days, more than a week ago, he had never dared to speak to her like that; she must have got the news wrong; perhaps Billy won his last battle after all. A hot answer rose to her lips, and died away again as Billy stared at her; then she turned, and entered the inner room.

"You can go in," she sneered when she came out again.

THE proprietor of the Crown and Cushion had evidently lunched pretty freely, so Billy found him in a jovial mood. He stroked the bulging piece of shirt that showed through his unbuttoned waistcoat, and shifted the cigar between his teeth, and sized up Billy with an eye that was critical but kindly.

"No, Bill, it's no go!" he said, shaking his head and blowing out a huge cloud of smoke. "I know what you're after; but you can't do it; you'll never make the weight again, and I daren't risk it. I dropped two fifty backin' you in that last go, to say nothin' about your trainin' exes."

"How much ha' you made the other times when I won?" asked Billy pointedly.

"I never made a penny more than I bargained for, Bill. I staked you every time, and I made my bit out of it. What have you done with your bit?"

"It's gone!" said Billy.

"Aye, it's gone! Where'd I be if my money was all gone the same way? You spent yours, and now you come to me for more. Where do I come in?"

"Here's where you come in!" said Billy, leaning forward with his face close up to Doyle's, and scowling to emphasize his argument. "'Tain't any use gassin' to me about where my money's gone. It's gone! I'm goin' to get it back. You've got to help me. See here! You give me a show at the welter-weights, and see what I'll do to 'em. I'll make a pile o' money! I got the punch, an' I got the guts; all I want's strength, an' grub'll do that, an' trainin'. You can fix it. You can start me in the welters, an' you'll see. I'll clean up the whole outfit!"

Doyle shook his head. "It'll take too long, Bill, an' it's too risky. Why, you lost that last fight because you weren't strong enough to kill a fly. You're too old to get strong now."

"Am I? I'll show you! I was weak from starvin' to make the weight, same as you told me to. Give me a couple o' months o' feedin' up an' proper trainin', an' just you see what I'll do to the welters. I can lick anythin' o' my own size that walks, when I'm fit!"

"You could once, Billy. I'm not bettin' on you to do it again! Are you dead broke?"

"O' course I'm broke. An' how am I goin' to be anythin' else? That's what licks me. Who's goin' to give me a job? Tell me that! I can't do nothin' but fight. See here, you gotter give me another chance at the fightin' game. I made a pile for you. You gotter!"

"I won't turn you out to starve, Bill; but you're through with fighting. You couldn't lick a louse any longer. Why don't you think o' goin' to the colonies? There's lots o' chances out there. Or—I tell you what—there's America—the States—why not go there? I'll give you a letter to Tom Geoghan, he's a friend of mine; he's well up in the fighting game, lookin' out all the time for new blood. Why not cross over and see if he can't help you?"

"Haven't got the price!"

"I'll give you that too."

"An' you won't do nothin' else? After the way I took your orders an' fought to suit your book an' took a beatin' from Pike Smithers what I could ha' licked wi' one hand, just so's you could bet against me, an' then starved an' sweated to make the weight an' took a real lickin' to suit you when I wasn't fit. Is that all you'll do?"

"Ss-ss-ssh!" said Doyle. "I'll do more than that, my boy. I'll pay your passage

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and give you some money to land with at the other end."

"How much money?"

"Ten pounds—a third-class passage and ten pounds. They won't let you land with less."

"Hand it over!" said Billy resignedly. "I thought better of you. I did straight! I done a—— of a lot for you in my time."

"I'm doing a —— sight more for you now than any other man would," answered Doyle angrily. "You cost me a heap o' money in that last fight; anybody else would see you jiggered 'fore he'd give you another lift! Who picked you out o' the gutter? Me! Who paid for all the teaching you had? Me, wasn't it? Who got you a job as sparring partner to Mike Daly, so's you could learn the game? Me! Who backed you when you fought? Me! An' who was the heaviest loser over your last fight? Me too!

"Still, you've been game, Bill, I'll admit that, an' you done your best. I'll do something for you yet. Here's a quid now; that'll keep you until the boat sails; come back here Thursday mornin' an' I'll have your ticket ready for you, an' that letter I promised you, an' I'll send a ten-pun note to the ship's purser for him to give you when you get aboard. That's the lot now—cut along and keep sober till Thursday—I'm busy!"

BILLY realized that he would lose even that slim chance if he wasted any more words; Doyle was evidently satisfied in his own mind that he was being generous, though as a matter of fact, of course, he was sending a played-out fighting man to starve where he would not be compelled to witness his sufferings, and even that was better from Billy's point of view than remaining where he was in London.

Fighting men who fail to reach the top mostly end the same way; they look and talk like "pugs"; they know no useful trade; people simply don't want them. A helping hand is usually denied them because the sort of people who might help them have an unwholesome horror of the "squared circle" and everything pertaining to it; so they drift down gradually by the way of the Salvation Army shelters to a seat on the Thames Embankment, and thence to jail. And the sort of food that is handed out in an English prison had no attraction for Billy Blain; so he took the sovereign and the thin chance that Doyle offered him, and bit hard on his pride.

The trip across the ocean was one of the greatest events of Billy's life; the food was plain, of course, but there were three square meals a day, and Billy's notion of a square meal was something to wonder at; he was feeling fine when he reached Ellis Island. But there his troubles began again.

The purser had handed him his ten pounds in gold on the evening of the second day out, and had held his tongue about it in the interest of his company; but it transpired that some one else had paid for Billy's ticket, so he was held for examination. The doctors were through with him in two minutes, but it took the board of examiners ten.

"How much money have you got?" asked the chairman.

Billy produced four English sovereigns.

"That's not enough," said the chairman; "the law is that you must have at least twenty-five dollars in addition to the fare to wherever you are going. Still we don't always insist on that. Have you a job to go to?"

"No," said Billy, who had been primed by the stewards on the way across.

"Well, what can you do for a living, supposing you are allowed to land?"

"Fight anything on two legs!" said Billy promptly.

So they sent him back to the detention rooms and slated him for deportation; the board's vote was unanimous.

But there are people on Ellis Island who are not quite so particular as the examining board—big Irish guards, for instance, who love any one who can fight and are sincerely sorry for any kind of "white man" whose fate it is to be cooped up in a detention room with forty or fifty unwashed men who are "not white." It was one of these who got the truth out of Billy, and told the Commissioner; and Billy was sent for before the board again.

"Is it true," asked the chairman, "that you had ten pounds with you when you left England?"

"Yes," said Billy.

"What did you do with the rest?"

"What's that got to do with you? Can't I do what I like with my own?"

"Um-m-m! Did you give any of it to a woman by any chance?"

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"Yes, I did. What of it?"

"Why did you give her your money?"

"'Cause she wouldn't have been able to land if I hadn't; she'd have broke her heart if she'd been sent back."

"Um-m-m! What about yourself? You knew that she needed at least five pounds to land with; how did you come to leave yourself with less than that amount?"

"Well, I ain't a woman, am I?"

"No, I guess you're not! The order for your deportation has been revoked."

"You mean I can land?" asked Billy.

"You may."

"Thank Gawd!" And Billy landed.

II

BILLY felt cocky as you please when he landed, for with Doyle's letter of introduction to Tom Geoghan, and twenty dollars into the bargain in his pocket, he could see no cloud in the offing anywhere.

He inquired his way to Geoghan's, and accosted that worthy with something approaching the old-time confidence that had won him half his battles.

"What's your weight?" asked Geoghan, eying him with evident suspicion, and cramming the half-read letter into his pocket.

"A hundred and forty when I left London."

"Thought so! And it's more likely a hundred and fifty now. You might as well weigh a ton! You haven't an earthly!"

"I'll do fine for the welters," said Billy, still confident; he thought that this was possibly Geoghan's method of bargaining.

"Did all your fighting as a light-weight, didn't you?" asked Geoghan.

Billy nodded.

"And couldn't make good, eh? And now you come over here and think you'll find a sucker to pay your board-bill and exes and stake you and advertise you and give you a show all for love! You're not the first that tried that on—not by a long way! You'd better go and chase up a job for yourself before you get hungry!"

"But here! You read that letter again, an' see what Doyle says. Don't he say I can use 'em?"

"He says you were an all-right light-weight—*were*, mind you. Who's Doyle, anyway? Besides, I know what that means; it means you're not strong enough to punch a hole in a piece of paper; you're like one o' those jockeys that can just sit on a horse and grin and long for dinner-time. I know; you can't play a new one on me! New York's full o' good game middle-weights an' welters that are glad to fight for five bucks a night, and can't get the chance o' that more'n once a month or so. Take my tip an' get a job on a farm, or layin' bricks, or somethin' with money in it."

"Don't you know any one who wants a sparrin' partner?" asked Billy, still determined. "I can take all the punchin' any one can give me, an' come back for more; I tell you I'm game!"

"So are heaps of others that I know of. No, I can't do a thing for you. You're too heavy for a light-weight, and too light for a middle-weight; and you don't look strong, either."

"Let me put the gloves on with somebody—just once—I'll show you! Pick a man in training—a middle-weight if you like—see what I do to him!"

"Nah-h. Nothin' doin'! I can size you up without tryin' you out. You're too big an' too weak. Good-day; I hope you get a job o' some sort."

But Billy Blain was still determined; it was not in his scheme of existence to give in as long as he could stand, and he consoled himself with the reflection that there were other men in New York besides Geoghan. So he tried every club-manager on the East Side, and every "pro" in training; he called on three sporting editors, numberless saloon-keepers, and tried even the moving-picture makers; but not a word of encouragement was to be met with anywhere.

Some of them advised him to hurry home to England before the Winter came, and one or two made a note of his address at the Mills Hotel, and promised to write later on; but nobody even hinted at the chance of a present engagement. And Billy was still determined. He kept rigidly away from drink and tobacco in order to be fit when his opportunity did come, and started off to make the rounds again.

It was not until every single cent had vanished and the pangs of hunger had begun gnawing him that he wandered disconsolately over to the West Side to hunt up a temporary job. The fighting game was his chosen profession, and he meant to stick

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to it, and he would have refused a steady job if any one had offered it; he simply wanted something—hard work in the open air for choice—that would keep him in funds and keep his stomach full until the great day came.

HE RAN into his opportunity on West Street, in the shape of an enormous Irishman in the unmistakable kit of a ship's engineer. The immediate cause of the meeting was the absence of five cents to buy a glass of beer with, and it was alcohol of a much more potent kind that later on brought matters to a head; for the present, though, O'Hanlon was particularly sober, Billy was still hungry, and the Fates seemed to be even more relentless than usual.

It happened this way. There was a desultory sort of dock-strike dragging out its course, and West Street was thronged with lounging seamen of every nationality under the sun — drunk, sober, half-seas over, maudlin, quarrelsome, good-natured, down-at-heel, prosperous—every kind of seaman of every sort of rating, and most of them with a dollar or more to spend. So the saloons were thriving. Billy, who knew nothing of unions and cared less, intended for the time being to become a blackleg, and he walked along West Street from pier to pier with the laudable idea of helping somebody unload a strike-bound ship, at the imminent risk of bodily injury, no doubt, but at something like double the usual rates. And as he walked his hunger grew until it was very nearly unbearable.

Over the way, where almost every other building shelters a bar of sorts, the big black notice-boards advertising the marvelous free lunch to be had inside grew as big as Broadway sky-signs in Billy's imagination. He simply couldn't keep his eyes off them. And of course the more he looked at them, the worse his hunger grew. By the time that he had walked the length of West Street and half the way back again the temptation became altogether too strong for him.

He deliberately chose the saloon that was doing the business, entered it together with half a dozen seamen, and helped himself in liberal handfuls to the pile of sandwiches that was heaped up on a dish on the free-lunch counter. He was well dressed still, and with any luck he should have escaped attention; but Billy's luck seemed to be altogether out at elbow. The barkeeper noticed him.

"I didn't see you buyin' anything!" said the white-aproned official pointedly.

"No?" said Billy. "You'd better peel your eyes!"

"Out o' this!" said the barkeeper, throwing up the hinged leaf of the counter and rushing through.

Billy never blamed himself for what followed; if a man's chin is weak and pointed, and he is fool enough to push it straight in the path of an absolute stranger's fist, what can he expect? The barkeeper lay full-length on his back on the floor of the saloon, drumming his heels and dreaming of rainbows; half of the men in the saloon stood and laughed at him, and two or three yelled murder; half a dozen opportunist experts began hastily swiping every sandwich in sight, and Billy dashed through the folding doors into the streets, thoroughly frightened for the first time in his existence.

As he ran he heard the yells of "Murder!" and though he thought he had not killed the man, he knew very well by the feel of the blow as it landed on the point of the fellow's chin that he had knocked him senseless; and he had yet to learn that over here in America the beating up of bartenders is not quite such a serious offense as it is likely to be regarded in England.

As he ran straight up West Street, past the Sailors' Home, the thought was in his mind that half the detectives in New York would be on his trail within an hour; so he kept glancing over his shoulder to see whether any one was following him. When a man is running at top speed he is wise if he looks only in front of him, and it was certainly a stroke of luck for Billy Blain that he crashed into nobody more vindictive than Terence O'Hanlon, chief engineer of the coasting steamer *Diogenes*.

"Whoops, my dear!" said O'Hanlon, throwing two huge arms around him and holding him in a grip like the bight of a ship's hawser. "Where are you goin' to, my pretty maid?"

THEY were two huge hairy arms that held him, dark and long like an orang-outang's, and stronger than any Billy had yet encountered; but he struck and struggled and plunged his elbow as a last resource into the giant's stomach, only to find the grip tighter yet.

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"Curse ye! Ye little scut!" said O'Hanlon, picking him clean off his legs and squeezing the breath out of him. "Who taught ye that trick, I'd like to know? 'T'll be the cops ye're runnin' from, I'll bet all the money in the worr-uld. Come in here, my son, while I find out why ye're runnin', an' see whether I'll hand ye over, or wring your neck, or what!"

"Lemme go, guv'nor!" panted Billy.

"So ye're a dirrty little Sassenach, are ye? 'Tis the first time anybody called me governor on the West Street! I'll not let ye go at all; ye'll come right in here with me!"

He led Billy up the steps of the Sailors' Home, and with a nod of recognition to the man at the desk, dumped him on one of the benches in the Seamen's room.

"Now then, ye little firebrand!" he ordered, still rubbing the place where Billy's elbow had landed, "tell me all about it before I hand ye over to the minions of the law; they're mostly all Irish like myself, an' they'll likely treat ye less gently than I did. Come on—talk!"

So Billy talked; he could see nothing else for it, and there was just the faintest chance in the world that this great, blue-coated, brass-buttoned giant might be a friend in disguise.

"Are ye sure ye killed him?" asked O'Hanlon.

"Garn!" said Billy; "I never killed him; I put him to sleep, that's all."

"Well, that saves ye from the chair, my son. 'Twill be no more than ten years up the river ye'll get, providin' he doesn't die within a week. And I've a mind to save ye from that! Did ye ever shovel coal?"

"Me?" asked Bill in amazement.

"I see ye didn't. I doubt ye never did an honest day's worr-k in your life. I'll alter it. Will ye shovel coal? I'm short a trimmer or two; I could make shift at a pinch with one more man, but I can't go to sea till I get him. Ye can be that man if ye like; they'll never look for ye aboard ship, an' ye can come back to New York when they've forgotten the crime ye've committed. I'm compounding a felony or worse, but I can't go to sea without trimmers, an' there ye are! Will ye come?"

"Where to?"

"New Orleans and back."

"I'm on!" said Billy. "But see here, I've got to have a feed before I do a stroke o' work. I'm that 'ungry you'd never believe."

"You can eat all ye like within the hour!" said O'Hanlon, getting up to go but keeping hold of Billy's sleeve. "Come, and I'll sign ye on."

III

SO WITHIN ten days of his having landed in New York Billy Blain was at sea again, though this time the circumstances were a little different. His conscience pricked him a little, not very much, but sufficiently to make him uncomfortable; he was a fugitive from justice, and a man's first experience of that sort is never very pleasant. As he walked aboard, close behind O'Hanlon, men shouted "Scab!" at him, and half a brick missed him by less than half an inch.

He got the square meal that he had bargained for, but he had to eat it in a filthy fo'castle, in which a crew of Greeks and Italians and one Chinaman chewed garlic and spat and eyed him all the while with evident suspicion. As Billy eyed the dingy hole he was to sleep in for the next month or so it would have been very difficult to persuade him that his luck had turned at last and that he was started on the road to fortune. He felt homesick, and as soon as the ship got under way he became seasick; and he hated and despised his companions with the whole-hearted loathing that only a London Cockney knows how to entertain for any kind of foreigner.

Within an hour, seasick though he was, he was fighting with four disgruntled and grievously insulted foreigners; they were the four other trimmers of his watch, and one of them had tried to order him about. The fo'castle was divided in two down the middle; the seamen slept on one side of the partition, and the firemen and trimmers on the other, the two classes mixing about as well as gunpowder and lighted matches. The seamen of the watch below, Americans all of them, came round to the firemen's side when they heard the noise of fighting, and sicked him on joyously, keeping the other inmates of the firemen's quarters from joining in. They decided that four at a time was enough, even for a white man to tackle. Billy felt better when he had blacked the eyes

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of every one of the four, and he went down to do his trick below feeling almost pleased with himself.

The work below, of course, was awful; there were four hours of it straight on end in the stuffy, dusty bunkers, shoveling low-grade soft coal out onto the fire-room floor. The Dagoes that he worked with were used to it; they knew the trick and left all the heavier work to Billy; but he went at it as though it were a fight that he had to win.

With his eyes and mouth and hair full of black grit, with the sweat that streamed off him formed into rivers of black mud and caking into solid blocks around his waist, he bored in and shoveled for his life. He meant to show the Dagoes that he was the better man at trimming as well as fighting. And they let him do the lion's share of the work, and laughed at him.

His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and his head sang; the ship rolled her gunwales under in a beam sea; great chutes of coal came sliding down from the upper bunkers in thundering, dusty, sudden cataclysms; the dim, screened light cast a ghastly, smoky pallor over everything; and Billy drove his shovel in and swung it round, drove it in again and stuck to it like a good 'un, while the Dagoes took it fairly easy and glanced at him from time to time and grinned.

Inside the fire-room the furnaces roared like the voice of a hungry mob. "*Clang*" went the fire-doors, and "*Ra-a-a-h*" went the firemen's shovels on the steel floor. "*Do it again—Do it again—Do it again,*" sang the engines.

Every now and then a sweating fireman shoved his head through the bunker door and shouted, "Hi, there! More coal! Are ye sleepin' or what?"

"*Pur-r-r*" went a dynamo somewhere inside the engine-room. "*Tuk-click—tuk-click—tuk-click,*" sang a score of pumps. Through and under and over everything was the hiss of escaping steam. "*Boom!*" went the sea outside, and the ship corkscrewed and plunged and rolled, and worried her nose into a mountain of black water. "*Crash!*" came the coal again from the upper bunkers, and "More coal" roared the fireman. Billy stood there, black as the ace of spades, and thought he was back in the ring again! The four hours were at an end before he knew it.

HIS back ached as he had never known it to ache, even after a long hard day of training; his hands—and he hadn't ladies' hands—were blistered and burned like fire; he was parched, giddy, and very nearly tired out; but he still had his wits about him. He knew that the four Dagoes had soaked him with more than his share of the work, and he meant to get even. As the next watch came down to relieve them he flung his shovel down and made for the iron ladder that led up on deck, but a Dago elbowed past him.

"You go to da galley. You geta da grub," said the Dago.

That sounded good to Billy; he realized suddenly that he was hungry again. If he did as he was told for once and fetched the grub, he would at least get first go at it; he could take his fill before the others could stick their filthy fingers in the mess, as he had seen them do when he first came on board. So he struggled along to the galley, hanging on by anything that gave a purchase, and carried the "kid" of stew forward to the fo'castle.

But the Dagoes had not let him fetch the food for nothing; among the four of them they had seven black eyes and thirty-two several insults to wipe out, and they meant to do it without any unseemly delay that might reflect still further upon their honor. They were waiting for him at the foot of the fo'castle steps when Billy came down with the "kid," holding it carefully in both hands and unable, as they imagined, to protect himself.

It surely was a fight that followed.

O'Hanlon, the chief engineer who had recruited Billy, was up on the bridge, getting a mouthful of fresh air and talking to the skipper. A heavy sea was running, and the night was full of noises, but both men heard the rough-house in the fo'castle, and leaned over the bridge to listen.

"What ha' ye shipped this trip, Terence?" asked the skipper. "A car-load o' tigers, or what? That's the second fight since we left New York."

"Seems I've signed on one tiger, anyhow!" said O'Hanlon. "There's only one white man among all that bunch of dock-rats—a little Cockney Englishman I picked up in West Street. Sounds to me as though he's tryin' to kill the lot o' them. One of us two had better go and see what's up, or shall I call the mate?"

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"No. You stay here, Terence, and take charge till I come back; I'll go myself."

The Captain clambered down the ladder from the bridge and worked his way slowly forward.

SILENCE was silent in the fo'castle, or at least in the firemen's side of it, when the skipper got there. He pushed his head through the fo'castle door.

"What's been doing down there?" he bellowed.

There was no answer.

"Are ye all dead or what?"

There was still no answer, so he started down the stairs. The light was full on in the fo'castle. There were men sleeping in some of the bunks, or pretending to sleep. The four Dagoes of Billy's watch sat in uneasy attitudes on a locker, and on the floor lay Billy, bleeding from a knife-wound in the head.

"Who knifed him?" demanded the skipper.

Nobody answered. The skipper bent over the prostrate body and tried to feel the heart-beats; but Billy moved, and began trying to sit up, so the skipper turned to the Dagoes again.

"Which o' you men knifed him?" he demanded.

Nobody answered.

"All right! Hand over your knives, the whole lot of you. Come on! Bring 'em all here, and lay them on the table!"

Nobody answered and nobody moved but Billy; he got up off the floor, staggered a little, and sat down on the nearest locker. The skipper stepped forward and seized the nearest Dago by the throat, banging his head against the woodwork of the bunk behind him.

"D'ye hear me? Give me your knife! Hand it over!"

Billy shook the blood out of his eyes and began to feel better; his wound was only superficial, and he was recovering from the effects of it with the fighting man's amazing quickness that is one of his chief assets.

"Hand 'em over!" said the skipper again, still holding the first man by the throat and reaching out to seize another one.

"Look out, guv'nor!" shouted Billy, springing across the floor.

A knife flashed and Billy seized it; and in a second he and the Captain and the four Dagoes were fighting like wildcats. The Captain was no duffer with his fists; the Captain of a coastwise tramp has no business to be. With Billy to help him, he had the four Dagoes out of action in a minute, bleeding and half-senseless on the floor. But men leaped from the bunks suddenly and joined in the fray. Billy and the skipper retreated slowly backward toward the steps, fighting every inch of the way.

"Stay by me!" roared the skipper. "Keep close!"

But Billy was a born-fighter, and he bored into the bunch of snarling trimmers as he had bored into the heap of coal a quarter of an hour ago, slugging with all his might; and the skipper had, perforce, to follow him.

It would have been all up with both of them if Terence O'Hanlon had not arrived on the scene. He had heard the noise and had lost no time in summoning the mate. The moment the mate came on to the bridge Terence rushed forward to help the skipper and waded into the fray with his enormous fists like a full-sized typhoon in a land-locked bay.

He was like to burst the bulkhead in his fury. They got every knife in the fo'castle, and took them upon deck and threw them overboard. The Captain took hold of Billy's arm and pushed him up the steps in front of him, Terence O'Hanlon coming up last to guard against surprises from behind.

"That's no place for a white man," said the skipper. "You'll stay in the starboard fo'castle from now on with the seamen, d' you understand? Come into the light here and let me see that cut on your head."

"Fetch him up on the bridge," said O'Hanlon; "we can see better up there. Lord love us, but the boy can fight! Did ye ever see the likes of it!"

"Not me!" said the skipper. "They'd have had me down but for him. Does that cut hurt you?" he asked.

"Nothin' to worry about," Billy answered. "I've had a sight worse hurts than that."

"Ah!" said the skipper, bending over him up on the bridge and examining the cut closely, "by the time that's washed out and I've put a couple o' stitches in it, or maybe three, you'll be little the worse. Who taught you to fight like that, eh?"

"It's my trade," said Billy, laughing.

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IV

THE steadiest, most resourceful, and severest engineer in all the coast-going fleet of merchant ships was Terence O'Hanlon—while he was at sea. On shore he was a different person. His ship was usually in New York for six days at a time; he was always sober the first day, because he had the owners to interview, and there were various matters relating to indents for the engine-room to be attended to; and on the last day before his vessel left port he was also sober—as an example to the crew. But in between times he was usually drunk. He never became fighting drunk or melancholy or sleepy; his was the foolish, good-natured type of jag that set his tongue wagging sixteen to the dozen and made him boast of things that never happened and never could happen.

So when the steamer *Diogenes* reached New York on her journey back from New Orleans, he was still very much "all there"; his engine-room was the cleanest and best kept of any steamer's on the coast, and his indents and accounts were ready and in order. He sent for Billy less than an hour after the ship had tied up at the pier-side, and received him in his cabin with his sleeves rolled up and a pen stuck behind his ear.

"Now then, young man," he demanded, "are you making another trip with us or not? You've made good. I never knew a man work better, an' I like ye. I'll take ye on as fireman for the next trip if ye'll come; but suit yourself."

"Sure," said Billy, "I'll go again. There ain't enough money comin' to me yet—not that I'd quit if there was. I'm getting stronger every day at this shovelin', an' that suits me to beat the band. I'll quit when I've saved some dollars an' got a bit more muscle on; then it's me for the ring again!"

"All right," said O'Hanlon. "You stand by the ship, then. I'll find ye plenty to do in the engine-room while we're in port, an' ye'll get paid for it. You rank as fireman from now on."

"Good for you, guv'nor!" said Billy. O'Hanlon grinned as his back disappeared through the doorway; he was accustomed to being called "sir" when aboard ship, but, barring an occasional referee, Billy had never called anybody "sir" in his life.

"There's the makin's of a man in that little stick o' dynamite," muttered O'Hanlon as he walked round the deckhouse to the Captain's cabin.

"I'll be goin' ashore this afternoon," he told the skipper; "I've a matter o' seven-fifty comin' to me at the office—back pay, an' a bit I've saved an' one thing an' another. I'm goin' up to draw it."

"I suppose that means you're goin' on the bust again! Lord! What a fool you are, Terence! Why, man, with your brains you could be anything if you'd keep off the booze!"

"Aw, can that!" said O'Hanlon. "Let me talk a minute. I'm goin' to deposit it with a buildin' society that's got an office on Broadway. I've a mind to build a house o' my own some day, to retire into when I quit the sea."

"I only hope you'll really do it, Terence. All right, the Second'll be in charge, then?"

"I only wish you'd stop preachin'! I might like ye better then. Yes, the Second 'll be in charge; I've told him what I want doin'. Oh, an' by the way, ye know that little scut of an Englishman that ye put on the seamen's side o' the fo'castle? He's comin' for another trip. I'm takin' him on as fireman, so ye'd better let him stay where he is."

"You don't mean to say he likes the job?"

"He likes the grub, an' he likes me, an' he thinks he's puttin' on muscle. I wish I could chase up another dozen o' his sort, but they ain't easy to find. Well, so long!"

TERENCE O'HANLON had really made up his mind this time to turn over a new leaf. He ought to have saved a deal more than seven hundred and fifty dollars during his career, but the fact that he had not done it could not be helped. He intended to begin now and make that seven hundred and fifty the basis of a snug little fortune. So he walked up to the office and drew his nest-egg, and then started off toward Broadway where the Building and Home Association office was.

It was just in keeping with his usual luck, though, that he should run straight into a fight-manager of his acquaintance at the corner of Fourteenth Street, and quite in keeping with his character that he should accept an invitation to drink.

"Where are you bound for, anyway?" asked the fight promoter.

"Oh, just up Broadway—a little matter o' private business—it can wait."

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"Why not put it over till to-morrow then, if there's no hurry? I'm goin' down to Sharkey's to-night to watch the prelims. I've got to find a man for Friday night. Have some dinner with me, and we'll go on there afterward."

Now O'Hanlon loved a fight better than anything else in the world. He would fight himself without overmuch inducement, but the knowledge of his enormous strength, and the risk he ran of injuring somebody permanently, took half of the pleasure out of that. But to see two evenly matched men scrapping for a purse was another story; he could think of nothing that he liked better than to watch it, and he knew, as all out-and-out fight-fans know, that the best fights are to be seen between men or boys at the bottom of the pugilistic tree, who need the money badly and are out to win it.

"I'll go with ye, Geoghan!" he said. "I'll be —— if I won't!"

Drinks followed round after round of drinks. Everybody in pugilistic circles knew Terence O'Hanlon, and a reputation such as his is not to be lived down in half a day. He soon grew tired of explaining why he wouldn't drink, and drank to save argument. He was "half-seas-over" before he reached the gymnasium even; it was long after midnight when he got back to the ship in what the skipper called "his usual condition" and tumbled into bed all standing.

He showed up in the skipper's cabin the following morning with a look of wo on his good-natured face that far surpassed any of his former symptoms of contrition.

"I know!" said the skipper promptly. "Drew the money out—took it up-town—got drunk and lost it! That right?"

"Not so bad as that! By the great horn spoon, Robert, I've done the drunkest,—— foolest, idiotiest thing I ever did in my life! I remembered it this morning when I looked in my wallet and found five hundred dollars missing."

"How did you come to lose it? Get held up?"

"I tell ye I didn't lose it! Won't ye listen! I gave it away, or as near as may be! I gave it to an official stake-holder down at Sharkey's club. He's got it now, and five hundred of the other man's, an' he'll give 'em both to the other man next Friday night unless a mirr-acle happens. It's awful to think about!"

"What have you been backin' yourself to do this time?" asked the skipper. "Jump over the Singer Building or what? Or maybe you're going to jump off it?"

"'Tisn't myself I've betted on. I'd be feelin' better if it was! I went down wi' a man named Geoghan——"

"I know Geoghan," interrupted the skipper. "He's an out-and-out crook."

"No, he's not! He's a little near the knuckle, that's all. Well, as I was tellin' you, only ye wouldn't listen, I went wi' Geoghan down to Tom Sharkey's an' we got talkin' fight. In between times I wouldn't be surprised if we had a drink or two—there was several there that knew me. Geoghan was sore as a bear about a fight he'd got arranged for Friday night. Joe Sullivan of Yonkers and Mike Evans of New York. Ten rounds at the welter limit for a purse o' five hundred dollars—no decision—three hundred for Joe Sullivan, and two hundred for Mike unless Mike chanced to win by a knockout, when the division was to be the other way round. Both boys had posted their forfeits, and the fight was goin' to be a dandy—half the fans in New York were comin' to see it.

"What happens then but Mike Evans gets a grouch about the division of the purse—or gets scared more likely—lets his forfeit go hang, and calls the fight off. I had some more drinks while he was tellin' me all that, an' when he told me he couldn't find a guy to fight in place o' this man Mike Evans, I bet him five hundred right off the reel that I'd got a man who could knock Joe Sullivan's block off—me never havin' seen Sullivan in my life, mind you!"

"Well?" said the skipper. "Did he take the bet?"

"We argued a bit first, but in the end the bet stood this way: I'm to find a man by ten o'clock on Friday night; he's to weigh in at welter-weight limit or less at the ringside, and he's got to go five rounds against Joe Sullivan without gettin' knocked out. If he does that I win five hundred dollars; if he don't I lose. If he stands up for ten rounds, my man gets two hundred for himself, and if he knocks out Joe Sullivan he gets three hundred, and Sullivan has to take the thin end; but if he don't go the ten rounds my man gets nothin'."

"That's sounds pretty much like Geoghan!" said the skipper. "He's probably got a man in Sullivan that's never been knocked out yet, and has won all his fights

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in the second or third round with a sleep-punch."

"That's just what he has got! But listen to me. The point is, d'ye think that little Englishman we've got in the fo'castle can fill the bill?"

"I don't know. I guess he's got pluck enough to try though, and he's your only chance unless you've met somebody else in your wanderings. You'd better fetch him up here and ask him."

SO BILLY was fetched up on to the bridge again and stood there in greasy overalls while O'Hanlon put the proposition up to him.

"Sounds like a chance to me!" said Billy. "Who's this bloke Sullivan? I never heard of him."

"He's a guy that can just make the welter weight limit," said O'Hanlon. "He's got a punch like a mule's kick, and wins by the knock-out route mostly. They say he's an Eyetalian, but whatever he is there's no doubt he's game."

"So'm I game!" said Billy. "There ain't nobody in the world that can finish me in five rounds, not at that weight! I maybe can't lick him, but see here, guv'nor, if I don't stay five rounds with this bloke Sullivan, you can kick me off the ship afterward! I'm stronger an' fitter'n I ever was—I ain't trained exactly, but I'm hard as nails. An' two hundred for me if I stay the ten? Crikey! You see me try for it!"

"If you only stay five, you'll get a hundred from me," said O'Hanlon, "I don't want you to fight for nothing."

"Good for you, gov'nor! You'll have to give me a chance to get clean, though—I can't go into the ring like this! It 'ud take me a week to scrape this muck off aboard ship."

"We'll go ashore this afternoon and have a Turkish bath together," said the engineer. "I'm thinkin' I could do wi' one myself! Get down to the engine-room now an' finish your work; I'll call for you at three o'clock— an' not a drink an' not a cigarette till Friday night, mind!"

"You bet yer life!" said Billy.

V

WHEN Friday night came O'Hanlon and the skipper were as nervous as children. Not so Billy. The ring looked good to him; the glare of the electrics over the rope-enclosed, canvas-covered square and the hum of the talking fans reminded him of home again, though he missed the sea of white shirt-fronts that used to make the background in the National Sporting Club in London.

The management had offered to provide him seconds and attendants, but he had insisted on having O'Hanlon in his corner, and Charley the cabin steward to use the towel; he had not even asked the name of the man who was staging the fight, but took it for granted that he was not all he ought to be.

"You don't know this game like I do," he told O'Hanlon; "they think I'm new to it and they'll try all the dirty tricks they know on me."

There were two hard-fought preliminaries before the time came for Billy's fight, so the fans were in a fairly good humor and a small burst of applause greeted him as he crawled through the ropes and sat in his corner. He had to sit there for five full minutes before the other man showed up, but that was only the first of their tricks to make him nervous, and Billy knew it. He felt about as nervous as a steam-roller.

"Let's look at that bottle!" he ordered. "Give it here!"

O'Hanlon passed him a bottle, already filled with water that had been provided by the management. Billy took it, smelt it, examined the rim carefully, and then emptied its contents on the floor behind him.

"Pitch that away, and the sponge and the bucket too!" he ordered. "Now take the ones that Charlie brought along, and go fill 'em at the tap yourself; then bring 'em back here and let nobody touch 'em till the fight's over. Keep the bottle in your hand the whole time, an' you, Charlie, keep your eye on that towel. Take care that no one monkeys with it. Where's the skipper?"

"Sittin' over there in the front row."

"Well, go and tell him never to mind the fight; tell him to keep his two eyes on my corner, an' watch out for tricks."

"What sort o' tricks?"

"—— you're green! Tell him if he sees any one come creepin' round here when you're busy, to come over himself an' watch the other man, that's all; I don't want my water doped, nor I don't want any pepper on the towel neither!"

So O'Hanlon went over to the skipper and whispered to him. The other nodded.

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"Now, remember," said Billy, when O'Hanlon came back again, "don't you claim no foul so long as I can stand up. If that guy finds he can't put me out he'll like as not try some dirty business in the fifth; if you're fool enough to claim a foul the referee 'll stop the fight, an' then the other man 'll claim your five hundred 'cause the fight didn't go five rounds as agreed, nor he won't pay me a cent neither. Savvy?"

"I never thought o' that!" said O'Hanlon.

"Well, think about it now, then, an' don't you forget it! Know the referee?"

"Known him years—he's straight as a die."

"Sure?"

"Certain."

"Good. Here they come. Now watch the fun begin!"

Joe Sullivan of Yonkers crawled leisurely between the ropes, scowled at Billy, and sat down in his corner; he was well known, and rounds of applause broke out the moment he showed himself. Six or seven men grouped themselves in the corner behind him; most of them looked like fighters, and all of them looked over in Billy's direction and laughed outright. One of them walked across the ring and stood straight in front of Billy, looking him over.

"Gee! What an awful looking rummy!" he remarked, and sauntered back again.

BILLY appeared quite indifferent; he was eying Joe Sullivan with nothing more than curiosity.

"He don't look such a bloomin' Jim Jeffries after all," he remarked. "He's a Dago, too, if ever I see one!"

"Feel like whipping him?" asked O'Hanlon, who was sweating and trembling with anxiety.

"Dunno yet. He's trained and I ain't. He looks trained a bit fine to me, though—he only made the weight by four ounces, an' I bet he's been sweating to do it. Wait here while I go an' see his bandages."

Billy strolled very coolly across the ring and claimed his privilege of inspection; it might have been a pack of wolves that faced him, the way they snarled and tried to scare him; but the referee entered the ring at that minute and Billy appealed to him.

"Here," he said, "look at this! He's got about a ton of iron wire round each fist! Call that tape? Why, it's as hard as rock, an' there's enough of it to rope a hox with. Look at his gloves too! That's dry blood, that's what that is—dry blood and resin! P'raps you think this is a slaughter-'ouse you've come to!"

There was a chorus of expostulation from Sullivan's corner, headed by Sullivan himself; they called Billy every kind of faker they could think of—accused him of living off free-lunch counters, and of keeping fit by running away from the police—howled at him—threatened him—snarled at him. But Billy stood his ground, still smiling; and the referee backed him up. Sullivan had to take off more than half the tape, and the referee ordered new gloves as well, which Billy examined carefully before tossing them to Sullivan.

He strolled back to his corner then, and two of Sullivan's seconds came across to retaliate. But Billy wore no bandages, and the gloves he had were new; they felt them carefully, and accused him of wanting to put gas-pipe in them. They told him that they knew his reputation, and that they couldn't be too careful with a crook like him in the ring; and then they sneered at O'Hanlon and asked him who let him escape from the Bronx Zoo.

In fact, they played all the old accepted tricks, and several new ones, for "getting their opponent's goat." But Billy sat still and smiled at them; they failed to realize that he was used to it, and wasted enough good hot-air on him to float a full-sized balloon.

The next move was made by the announcer, and both men stood up while he introduced them and bellowed his set speech to the audience.

"Gentlemen," he shouted, "the match between Joe Sullivan of Yonkers and Mike Evans of New York, for ten rounds at the welter-weight limit this evening, unfortuately fell through owing to a misunderstanding at the last moment. Rather than disappoint you all, the management has secured the services of Billy Blain of London, England, who will take Mike Evans' place. You all know Joe Sullivan, winner of——" and he reeled off a list of Sullivan's victories, actual and alleged.

"This, gentlemen, is Billy Blain, unknown hitherto on this side of the water, but a former runner-up for the light-weight championship on the other side. This is his first appearance in the ring in America,

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and his first appearance in any country at more than a hundred and thirty-three pounds ring-side. Kindly keep your seats, gentlemen, while the match is in progress."

The announcer retired to the accompaniment of a little clapping, and a distinct murmur of disappointment; then the referee called the two men into the center for instructions. Joe Sullivan made one more attempt to get on Billy's nerves, standing between him and the referee and turning his back on him scornfully; Billy seized him by the elbows, and spun him around and backward out of the way. The fans roared with laughter, and it was Sullivan who lost his temper—not Billy. The talk with the referee was soon over; they agreed to fight straight Queensberry rules, break clean, and protect themselves at all times.

Then the referee drew back to one side of the ring, and the men shook hands perfunctorily and stood sizing each other up—Billy smiling and indifferent, and Sullivan scowling fiercely under lowered eyebrows.

"Now keep your head, sonny!" called O'Hanlon in a stage whisper that could be heard all the way across the house.

Everybody laughed, including Billy, but he did not turn his head. The crowd in Sullivan's corner howled derision—dubbed him sonny on the spot—named O'Hanlon "poppa"—and kept a running fire of jokes on the subject that made O'Hanlon nearly mad with rage.

"Time!"

SULLIVAN crouched suddenly, as James J. Jeffries used to do, and began walking crab-wise round Billy, looking for an opening. The crouch is a very useful attitude to take with a beginner, for it scares him and rattles him and looks almost impossible to take advantage of. Billy reached over suddenly and caught him a chopping blow on the top of the head that brought him upright in a second, and as he straightened out of the crouch Billy ripped in a left-hook to the mouth that drew blood, jumping clear again like a flash.

It was neat work, and first blood for Billy; the house roared. Sullivan bored in then with his head low, swinging a savage left for the body; Billy waltzed out of the reach of it and punched him on the ear as he passed, drawing blood again. Sullivan rushed in to a clinch, and Billy chopped him out of it again with short-arm body-blows, but slipped as he broke away, and Sullivan got home with a regular pile-driver to the heart that sent Billy sprawling on his back.

"Ah-h-h!" roared the house.

But Billy was up again like a flash and as lively on his feet as ever, avoiding Sullivan's swings and getting in an occasional blow to the head that roused Sullivan's temper but did little damage. At the call of time it was anybody's round.

"D'ye think ye can go the five?" asked O'Hanlon, leaning over him, as Charlie flapped him diligently with the towel.

"Dunno yet," said Billy; "he'll begin fightin' in the second—you see!"

He did, too. At the call of "Time," Sullivan tore across the ring, well over to Billy's side, and began slugging like a madman. Billy blocked one blow, and ducked another, managing to get home on Sullivan's chin with a stinging upper-cut; but Sullivan began roughing him at close-quarters, so Billy sprang away, dancing in and out and beating a light tattoo every now and then on Sullivan's head.

Sullivan got him against the ropes once, half-way through the round, and slammed in a terrific right to the body; Billy clinched, and Sullivan leaned all his weight on him and roughed it with his elbows and forehead, but Billy chopped him out of it before the referee had time to interfere. It was Sullivan's round, but the blood in his mouth was bothering him, and he had used up an awful lot of steam. Billy seemed quite fresh still.

Sullivan repeated his tactics in the third round, scarcely troubling to guard, and slamming for the body with all his might. Billy took advantage of every opening, sending in stinging blows to the face, paying particular attention to Sullivan's left eye, which was beginning to look red and swollen, and avoiding his opponent's swings by clever foot-work. He waltzed backward round and round the ring, using all the science he possessed; Sullivan followed viciously, trying to bore in and force him against the ropes, but Billy always slipped away.

"Hit him, Billy!" shouted O'Hanlon; and again the house roared.

"Yah!" shouted Sullivan's adherents, "your man's afraid! Make him go in and fight!"

But Billy kept on running away, avoiding anything like in-fighting, and letting Sul-

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livan tire himself by slugging at the empty air. A few of the wiser fans applauded, but most of them wanted to see blood.

"Take him out!" shouted fifty or sixty of them, rising in their seats; "put on some one who can fight!"

But Billy kept on waltzing backward round and round the ring; and Sullivan kept on slugging. He landed one on Billy's ribs in the last half-second, and Billy went to the floor and stopped there till the bell rang. He got up then, though, and walked to his corner calmly enough.

"Can ye do it?" asked O'Hanlon. "D'ye think ye can do it, boy?"

"Dunno," said Billy. "Use your sponge, an' quit talkin'!"

Sullivan's efforts in the first three rounds had evidently tired him a little, for he changed his tactics in the fourth and waited for Billy to begin. Billy obliged him by dancing round him and closing his left eye completely with a punch that could be heard all over the gymnasium. He followed it up with a left-right-left to the body, and took a fairly hard wallop on the jaw in exchange.

"Cover up!" called Sullivan's seconds.

But the Italian was getting wild and refused to listen. He went in after Billy like a madman again, and Billy spent the rest of the round waltzing away from him. Toward the end of it Sullivan managed to clinch and hold on; Billy kept up a tattoo on his ribs, but Sullivan roughed it again with his head and elbows, using every foul trick in his catalogue and wearing Billy down with his weight.

O'Hanlon had to bite the sponge to keep himself from claiming a dozen fouls, but he remembered Billy's orders and said nothing. The bell saved Billy from getting a still worse roughing, but as it was, he walked to his corner with his mouth and nose bleeding, and not looking any too fresh.

"Ye ought to hit him more!" said O'Hanlon, plying the bottle and sponge.

"Aw, shut up!" said Billy, spitting. "You wait!"

DURING the minute between the fourth round and the fifth, Geoghan hurried round to Sullivan's corner and gave him whispered instructions; Billy saw Geoghan then for the first time, and recognized him. He realized, for the first time, that the man who was most interested in his defeat was the same man who had turned him down so mercilessly when he arrived in New York.

"Geoghan runnin' this?" he asked O'Hanlon.

"Sure! Didn't you know it?"

Billy said nothing.

If he had been evasive and exasperating in the first four rounds, he was infinitely more so in the fifth. He knew very well without being told what Geoghan's instructions had been to Sullivan; he was to try for a knock-out at once. So he ran away during almost the whole round, tiring Sullivan in his efforts to come up with him, and not even trying to do any damage.

"Oh, hit him, Billy!" called O'Hanlon.

"Hit him!" shouted the fans.

"Yah! he's afraid!" shouted Sullivan's crowd.

And Billy dodged and danced and ran and jumped away, while Sullivan sent over pile-driver after pile-driver that hit the empty air or grazed off Billy's elbows.

Suddenly, when the round was all but over, Billy straightened like a flash, his right shot out like a piston-rod; there was a smack that sounded like the report of a pistol, and Sullivan reeled backward with the lower part of his face a mass of blood. Billy followed up with a left-right-left to the body, and the bell saved Sullivan from going to the mat.

He went to his corner with a broken nose, and a crimson spot just below his heart that was growing bigger and angrier-looking every minute. His seconds had no time for abuse now; they were too busy attending to their man.

"That's the style, boy!" said O'Hanlon. "Give him some more like that, and ye've got him!"

"You've won *your* money," answered Billy; "now watch me win *mine!*"

A full half-minute of the sixth round went by before the fans really got going; they were too surprised to do more than yell in monosyllabic chorus. Sullivan came into the ring with one eye closed, and looking tired, but nothing like beaten. Billy walked into him from the word go, rushed him, mixed it at close quarters, stood up to him toe to toe and slugged him, drove him backward against the ropes, and sent his head back with three rousing hooks to the jaw!

Sullivan woke up and answered slug for slug, but Billy's boxing was too clever for him; when he tried to clinch to save him-

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self, Billy waltzed round him and hit him where he pleased, while the fans nearly tore the roof off with their noise.

At the end of the round Sullivan staggered, rather than walked, to his corner; the red blotch under his heart had spread till it was about six inches square, and his other eye seemed to be closing too.

"I've got him in the next!" said Billy, panting and taking a swig from the bottle.

"—— ye! I believe ye have!" said O'Hanlon. "Ye little fire-brand, why didn't ye fight like that at first?"

The seventh went less than half a minute. Billy started the ball by sending an awful wallop home straight on the crimson blotch, and Sullivan groaned and doubled up. A right on the top of the head brought his chin up again, and Billy swung for it with all his strength and weight. Down went Sullivan, flat on the broad of his back—his arms outspread on either side of him, and his eyes shut.

"Stand back!" ordered the referee; and Billy stood back and dropped his hands and waited.

"Seven—eight—nine—ten!" counted the referee. "He's out!"

"Sullivan's seconds ran into the ring and picked their man up; the referee patted Billy on the shoulder.

"Well done!" he said; "that's some punch you've got!"

Billy walked over to his corner and clambered out of the ring. "Go get your money!' he told O'Hanlon. "You'll find me in the dressing-room; Charlie can rub me down."

WHEN O'Hanlon and the skipper reached the dressing-room ten minutes later, Billy was already washed, and very nearly dressed.

"Ye darned little scut!" said O'Hanlon, "why didn't ye knock him out sooner? I believe ye could ha' done it. What did ye run away from him for?"

"I never met nobody greener than you!" said Billy. "What was the bet? I had to go five rounds, didn't I? Well? S'posin' I'd handed him a sleep-punch in the fourth —you wouldn't have won the bet, would you? Have you got the money?"

"I have," said O'Hanlon; "here's my thousand, and here's your three hundred."

"Good," said Billy, "keep it! I'm goin' to do one more trip to sea, an' shovel coal; there ain't a better way o' puttin' muscle on as ever I see; I ain't strong enough yet. Did you see how he wore me down in the clinches?"

"There's that hundred, too, that I promised ye," said O'Hanlon.

"Keep it!" said Billy. "No. Wait a bit—tell you what you do. There's a bloke, name o' Doyle—lives at the Crown an' Cushion, High Street, Putney. Send him eighty dollars wi' my regards. He's a piker, he is. I wouldn't like to owe him money longer'n I could help. He might need it for the washin' or somethin'; send him that at once. Put the rest in a bank, an' remember, you've got to get me a good match when we get back from the next trip; you'll be my manager, an' we'll use that money for forfeits an' side bets, an' trainin' exes—see?"

"You're on!" said O'Hanlon.

At that minute in came Geoghan.

"Say!" he exclaimed, "why didn't you tell me what class of man you were when you came to me before? I'd no idea you could fight like that! I'll take you over from now on; you ought to make a middle-weight by and by, and anyhow I'm dead sure you can clean up the welters."

"I done all the talkin' to you I'm ever goin' to, an' I got all the managers I want!" said Billy. "You go to ——!"

And he took the arms of the skipper and O'Hanlon and disappeared into the street outside.

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The Great Carbonburg Bank Robbery

by Everett Samuel Lyon

IT WAS a warm, sunny, Spring afternoon in Carbonburg. Theodore Deunsing, city chief of police, mustached, florid and Teutonic, having first pulled out the bottom drawer of his desk that he might place his feet therein, leaned back in his office chair, linked his pudgy hands behind his bristling blond head, and let his watery blue eyes gaze dreamily over his fat cheeks at a highly colored picture above the desk.

The picture represented a huge red wagon, drawn by four mammoth gray horses. Emblazoned on the red, in high white characters, were the words: DEUNSING POP; for be it known that Theodore Deunsing, chief of police of Carbonburg under the Democratic administration, was an officer but incidentally. Primarily, paramountly and essentially, he was the manufacturer of Deunsing pop.

"Deunsing pop, by Gott, der greatest pop vot pops!" to quote from the honorable Theodore himself.

As the chief was thus comfortably musing on the gastronomic virtues and the effervescent glories of Deunsing pop, there came a rude awakening. In burst the desk sergeant, Michael Donnelly, red-haired, red-faced, red-eyed. Donnelly was highly envious of his chief's position, and could "say no use av a Dutchman on a polayce foorce onnyway."

"Here's a tillygram fur y'r Honor," he blurted.

With some heavy breathing, the chief extricated his feet from the drawer of the desk and hurtled his body forward to a perpendicular position. Then he reached for the telegram. This is what he read, in the cipher of the National Detective Agency:

CHIEF OF POLICE, CARBONBURG:

We have authentic information that Eddie Quinn's gang will hold up and rob the Carbonburg National Bank at twelve o'clock, noon, to-morrow.

THE NATIONAL DETECTIVE SERVICE.

Now I would like to pause here to quote heroically and appropriately from Sir Walter Scott. Deunsing

". . . was brave, though to his heart
The life-blood thrilled with sudden start."

But it would not be true. As to the alcoholic dilution, which Mr. Deunsing would have sworn to be a Germanic strain of a high order, it did perhaps ooze less sluggishly than before through his arteries. But with reference to his courage, suffice it to say that the opposition newspaper—the Carbonburg *Republican*—had long since christened him "Terrible Teddy." To be frank about it, Chief Deunsing, officially and personally, was frightened.

Chief of police only incidentally he might be, and in Carbonburg at that, but he knew

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enough of the world of crime to be familiar with the National Detective Service and their system of securing "tips" on "jobs." And as for Eddie Quinn and his band of clever, daring men, it was not necessary to be in any police department to have knowledge of them.

So Deunsing sat bolt upright, while Donnelly read the telegram. Donnelly's red eyes grew redder.

"We'll git the dirty divils!" he said.

"But, mein Gott, vot vill ve do first?" begged Deunsing.

"Let the whole town know, an' git a bunch o' spicials sworn in!" snapped Donnelly, and turned back to his room.

And thus Carbonburg became like a city besieged.

When the Assyrian host encamped about Jerusalem and shut up the great Jehoiachin "like a bird in a cage," the nerves of the embattled Israelites are said to have become a trifle unsteady. When Hannibal confronted Rome, history insists that Rome trembled. And now Carbonburg, to an extent that might have done credit to a mightier foe and a greater knowledge of historical precedent, gave the customary reaction.

She went to bed with a cold thrill of fear in her heart. She woke the next day with a quiver and a quake. The day before Carbonburg had been a quiet, rural city; today she stood in arms. People began to flock down-town. Men jostled one another on the street and talked of nothing but the coming hold-up. Women hurried shrinkingly among the crowd, edging close behind their husbands, or peeped, timid but persistent, from behind doors and windows.

Excitement increased with the hours. By ten o'clock only the bedridden were at home. Carbonburg was on the street in her own defense. Confidence grew with the crowd. The city became almost festive. A flag or two broke into the air, and, amid cheers, bunting appeared on the Main Street stores.

But what of Deunsing and the Carbonburg force? Had they proved traitors to their city? Not they. By nine o'clock, Deunsing, buoyed by repeated gulps from a quart bottle, had been at the bank. He at once recognized it as a strategic point. An entire block had been devoted to this building and the Granger County Courthouse. The buildings stood perhaps two hundred feet apart, each entirely surrounded by a square of bright green lawn. Across that little open space of green no one could hope to pass without exposing himself to distinct view.

Deunsing grasped this fact with the instinct of a Napoleon. Within the bank, in charge of Donnelly, he placed six plain-clothes men. The remaining ten men of his force, disguised as village loafers (this disguise being easily assumed by the Carbonburg policemen), he distributed in careless attitudes about the little lawn, so that the bank was entirely surrounded. And finally, as a masterpiece of military genius and a brilliant expression of public feeling, he had pressed into service the huge red pop wagon. This, like a dreadnaught on wheels, had been drawn up across the street, directly opposite the bank. And in this vehicle, sworn in as special police, commanded by Deunsing himself, and concealed like Ali Baba's thieves in the oil-jars, were six husky bottlers from the pop factory. The ambush was ready. The stage was set for "battle, murder, and sudden death."

AT PRECISELY five minutes to twelve a small man, wearing nose glasses, a close dark beard and a gray suit, appeared from no-one-knew-exactly-where, and stepped across the open space before the bank. He carried a walking stick easily under one arm and walked with a free, nonchalant grace.

Carbonburg held her breath, and the eyes of Carbonburg settled as one on this little man who stepped so coolly across the lawn. Quickly he entered the bank. He paused a second and glanced about. The plain-clothes men tried to look uninterested, but felt for their guns. Then the little man apparently saw what he wanted, and walked straight to the window of the paying teller. The paying teller seemed to be coming down with the ague. His mouth fell open. The little man spoke with a low, easy voice.

"I'd like to have a New York exchange draft for five dollars," he said. "Make it payable to the Germanic Steamship Company."

The teller's teeth came together again. He reached for a pen. The hand of the little man went back to his hip pocket. Donnelly was behind him, silent as a cat.

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His revolver was within two inches of the little man's head. Had the teller seen it he would have fainted. But he was trying to write. Neither did the man before the window appear to notice the danger. Just as quietly his hand came from his hip pocket and rested on the ledge of the window. In it he gripped a large black pocket-book. From this he drew a five-dollar bill and passed it to the teller.

Donnelly slipped his gun quickly out of sight.

"The —— fool, to be doin' business at this hour!" he grunted to himself.

The little man took his draft, folded it, slipped it into his pocket, turned to the water-cooler for a drink, and stepped to the door.

OUTSIDE, Carbonburg was still holding its breath. But dramatic and intense though the action upon the Carbonburg stage was that day, it was not all before the scenes. At the moment when the eyes of the municipality were fastened upon the little man making his solitary and daring assault upon the Carbonburg National, two quiet but smiling gentlemen were entering the Granger County Court-house on the side away from the bank.

Without undue difficulty they located the county treasury. The chief guardian of this receptacle, a gray-haired veteran who had held the office for twenty years, chiefly because of the number of Indians and wolves he had effaced in early days, had stepped out into the hall and was earnestly engaged in making a full-front intaglio impression on the window which overlooked the bank. The visitors did not disturb him in this occupation, but entered the vault which was open for the day's business. Granger County taxes had been payable during the current month.

As the little man who had bought the draft left the bank, Donnelly followed. Over the edge of the pop wagon, like a hydra-headed jack-in-the-box, protruded the heads of Deunsing's corps. Donnelly stepped across to the wagon quickly.

"Nothin' doin' with him. Jist gittin' a draft," he half whispered.

"Look sharp now, it's just twilve!"

And indeed as the specials dropped back out of sight, the Granger County Court-house clock, two hundred feet away, struck high noon. As it did so, two men, carrying satchels, stepped from the court-house door, on the side away from the bank.

Six minutes later, the Overland Express, having paused and sighed at Carbonburg, was speeding westward. Three passengers had just found seats in a deserted end of the smoker. One was the little man in the gray suit. The other two were the gentlemen who had stepped from the court-house as the clock struck twelve. All three chuckled as they settled the grips between their feet. The little man leaned far forward, removed his glasses and beard with one hand and dropped them carelessly out of the window. Then he lifted the satchels quizzically.

"How much?" he asked.

"An even twenty thousand, Eddie," answered one of the men, a jovial-looking chap, "all bills!"

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Victoria Cross Stories

by Allen Stephens *

IT IS simply a bit of bronze, cast in the shape of a Maltese cross, one and one-half inches in diameter, and worth about nine cents in our money—ribbon included. And yet, up to date, five hundred and fifty-two British subjects have courted what seemed to be certain and sudden death in order that they might wear one of these bits of bronze and become privileged to append the letters "V. C." to their names; and of these, fifteen never lived to enjoy their honors—they died to win.

When Queen Victoria instituted the Order of the Victoria Cross by her Royal Warrant of January 29, 1856, it is more than likely that she was inspired by the immortal Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava some two years before. At any rate, she felt that a new naval and military order was necessary in order to distinguish those brave men who, by their valor, particularly signalized themselves during the Crimean War.

The first public announcement of the new decoration was made by the British War Office under date of February 5, 1856, in part, as follows:

> The Queen has been pleased, by an instrument under her Royal Sign Manual, of which the following is a copy, to institute and create a new Naval and Military Order, to be styled and designated "The Victoria Cross," and to make the rules and regulations therein set forth under which the said decoration shall be conferred.

Then followed a typed copy of the royal warrant setting forth the object of the new order, together with various rules and regulations. Among other things, it was provided that nothing save "the merit of conspicuous bravery gives claim for the decoration, and it must be evinced by some signal act of devotion or valour in the presence of the enemy." It was further provided that the medal was to be cast from Russian cannon captured at Sebastopol; that the suspending ribbon should be blue for the navy and red for the army; that every additional act of bravery might entitle the holder to a bar or clasp; and that recipients other than commissioned officers would be entitled to a government pension of £10 a year, and an additional £5 for each clasp.

From year to year various supplementary regulations have been added to the original warrant; thus a larger grant not to exceed £50 yearly may now be awarded holders of the V. C. who find themselves in actual need; and every grade and rank of all branches of King George's forces, both British and Colonial, are eligible for a V. C., with the single exception of the native ranks of the Indian army, who have an equivalent decoration in their own Order of Merit.

Russia has its Order of St. George; Austria, the Order of Maria Theresa; Germany, the Order of Merit, and the Iron Cross; France, its Legion of Honor; and we of the United States, our Medal of Honor. In some respects these orders are analogous to the Order of the Victoria Cross, notably in the case of the Iron Cross of Prussia and the Medal of Honor of the United States; but in many respects the V. C. differs from the other orders, especially in that it may not

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be won by services of a civic nature, nor can money or social position influence its bestowal in the slightest degree.

The blackest negro private in the West Indian regiments of King George is eligible for a Victoria Cross, as is the proudest peer of the blood royal in military service. The humblest cockney recruit that ever picked up "fag ends" in the Euston Road before enlistment is as much in line for a V. C. as was Lord Roberts himself. The youngest drummer boy in the British army is on a par with a field marshal in that respect.

An Oxford gownsman, a son of the Prime Minister, a Canadian farmer lad, a New Zealand herder of sheep, a Yorkshire lout, an Irish potato harvester, and a Lancashire millhand are all in the same boat in so far as the Victoria Cross is concerned, for it is at once one of the most democratic but yet select roll of names in the annals of heroism.

Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, iron-nerved soldier and "Man of Destiny," is entitled to nearly half the letters of the alphabet after his name. He was made Companion of the Bath in 1889, a Knight Commander of the Bath in 1896, and was given a G. C. B. in the same year, entitling him to wear the grand cross of the same order. Yet he can not write the letters V. C. after his name, nor can his reputation as a soldier-commander or his elevation to the peerage win a V. C. for him.

Not that the Baron of Khartoum is deficient in courage, or at all lacking in the stuff that enters into the composition of heroes—he may never have had an opportunity; and it takes an opportunity as well as utter disregard for mortal consequences to start one on the road to a Victoria Cross.

THE FIRST PRESENTATION

ONE beautiful morning in June of 1857—to be exact, upon the twenty-sixth—one year after the close of the Crimean War, a large body of troops was paraded in Hyde Park, London. Life Guards in shimmering corsets of steel, dragoons with clanking sabers, hussars in natty array, royal engineers and horse artillery in their best tunics, a regiment or two of infantry of the line in freshly pipe-clayed belts and helmets, and a sizable detachment of bluejackets was drawn up to witness the award of the first batch of crosses. It had been officially given out that Queen Victoria proposed to award the new decorations in person, and a multitude of Londoners ranged themselves in the rear of the military.

Shortly before ten o'clock a royal salute of twenty-one guns stirred the mass of civilians to prolonged cheers, and Queen Victoria appeared mounted upon horseback. On her right was the Prince Consort; on her left, Sir Colin Campbell, in command of the troops present. Then followed the Crown Prince of Prussia, the Prince of Wales and Prince Alfred, the two latter youths attired in kilts of Scotch plaid and mounted upon Shetland ponies.

A cloth-covered dais had been erected upon a strip of green turf in a suitable position. Upon a table close at hand, showing up in strong contrast with the table covering of scarlet velvet, lay the bronze crosses with ribbons of crimson and blue—sixty-two of them in all.

A short distance off, the naval and military candidates for the new decoration were drawn up in line; and as Lord Panmure, the Secretary for War, called out each man's name, the one designated marched briskly to the edge of the dais. With a kind word and a smile of reassurance for each of them, the Queen received the crosses from the hand of her Secretary for War, one by one; and then leaning over in her saddle without dismounting, pinned them to the left breasts of the Crimean veterans who had dared—and lived.

As each man received his cross, he saluted and took up his station in a line formed abreast of the royal party. Lieutenant Lucas of the royal navy, since risen to the rank of rear admiral, was the first to be decorated. Then followed the sixty-one others.

After the last man had taken his place in the line formed some fifty yards opposite the Queen's position, Sir Colin Campbell gave a signal to one of his trumpeter orderlies. Obedient to the trumpet call, the foot regiments swung into quarter-column formation and marched past the decorated heroes. Then followed the cavalry contingent headed by Lord Cardigan, riding the same horse that had borne him safely through the Valley of Death up to and beyond the very muzzles of the Russian guns.

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Twice the entire body of troops marched past, first at the quickstep and then at the double. The infantry then drew off, and in the twinkling of an eye the horse artillery came by at the gallop. The gorgeous spectacle of seasoned troopers, belonging to nearly every branch of the British army, charging down Hyde Park in the presence of their Queen made a hundred thousand British hearts beat the faster. The wheels of the gun-carriages bit into the green turf, the cheers of the populace drowned the music of the trumpets and drums, and—the first presentation was over.

Since that memorable event the roll has become a long one, comprising the names of all sorts and conditions of men, differing in social status, in creed and in color, but all alike in one respect, in that all have miraculously escaped an untimely death while in the performance of some conspicuously gallant deed in the presence of the enemy.

Rule 15 of the regulations pertaining to the Order of the Victoria Cross provides that the decoration may be taken away, the annual pension stopped, and the name erased from the roll, of any recipient found guilty of treason, cowardice, felony or infamous crime. Up to date the roll of heroes remains undishonored as a matter of course. Men who risk their lives to save wounded officers and comrades from a fanatical and treacherous foe will hardly stoop to pick a pocket or dishonor the flag under which they were once prepared to die.

It would be a hard matter to decide which particular deed out of the five hundred and twenty-two was the noblest. In fact, in some instances the cross was awarded for a series of gallant actions on the part of a single individual, each act worthy of a V. C. itself. This fact tends to complicate the difficult if not impossible task of making a selection. True, some of the deeds which won a cross have been more spectacular than others. Thus the lancers, hussars, and dragoons who earned a V. C. during the brief but memorable Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava will, in all probability, be better known to posterity than the civilian clerk "Lucknow" Kavanagh, the brave Irishman who earned a Victoria Cross by his wonderful daring in leaving Lucknow with dispatches and plans, picking his way through a country infested by 60,000 vigilant, murderous Sepoy troopers, that aid might be summoned to the besieged city.

THE NEGRO WHO WON A CROSS

THE Indian Mutiny was in full swing. Early in 1857 the mysterious *chapatis* of unleavened bread had been passed from village to village, together with the sinister message, "Everything will become red." Misled by treacherous and designing native princes, the Sepoys had turned upon the English.

Fresh from Hongkong after the news of the outbreak at Meerut, H. M. S. ***Shannon*** disembarked a body of bluejackets at Calcutta and all haste was made to the relief of the English garrison at Cawnpore. Sir William Peel, who had gained distinction and a V. C. during the Crimean War, was in command of the bluejackets; and among the latter was one William Hall, a negro captain of the foretop who had seen service in the Crimea.

Pulling their 24-pounders over the rough roads, the naval brigade joined Havelock's relieving column, and every nerve was strained to reach Cawnpore in time, for it was known that about six hundred Europeans were cooped up in the city, including many English women and children.

Cawnpore was reached upon the 16th of July, and a crushing blow dealt the bloodthirsty hosts of the unspeakable Nana Sahib. But the effort was wasted in the main, for scarcely twenty-four hours before, while Havelock's column was within a day's march, the massacre which startled the civilized world had been perpetrated. Four hundred-odd men had surrendered, owing to the blunder of a senile and weak-kneed general, and more than two hundred women and children had been left to the mercies of the fiendish foe under Nana Sahib.

The men of the garrison had been cruelly decoyed to their deaths—wantonly shot down in cold blood after the surrender, several weeks before the arrival of General Havelock and his men. The women and children had been triumphantly inspected by Nana Sahib and then locked up in a gloomy chamber. There they were kept for some time, during which their numbers were swelled by the arrival of fresh prisoners to a total of two hundred and eighteen. The Nana had been in no hurry to slaughter them, but the near approach of the avenging forces hastened his action, and on the 15th of July his edict went forth for the massacre.

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The Nana commanded the Sepoys to shoot through the windows into the closely packed masses of women, but even his men, hardened as they were to their leader's atrocities, could not bring themselves to murder the women and children in cold blood. They contented themselves with firing a single volley over their heads. But other less scrupulous instruments were quickly found, and five brutal-looking natives, each armed with a glittering *tulwar*, entered the crowded chamber and closed the door behind them.

To the listeners outside came the sound of low wailings, of running feet, and the dull thuds of the butchers' swords. Presently the door opened and one of the murderers came forth brandishing a broken sword. Quickly borrowing a fresh blade, he resumed his ghastly task. The work of carnage went on.

To picture the scene within the room would baffle the imagination of Dante. The mind recoils from a scene at once so hideous and appalling. It was dark when the five men crept shamefacedly from the chamber of horrors, their garments saturated with British blood. They locked the door behind them and proceeded to report to Nana that his will had been accomplished.

The next morning the bodies were taken out, stripped, and thrown into a well. In many the spark of life still lingered, but living and dead were remorselessly cast together into the pit. The horror of it! With Havelock barely a score of miles away!

Scattered like chaff before the wind, the followers of Nana dispersed before the onslaught of the avengers; and upon the afternoon following the battle, the negro Hall and a group of his bluejacket shipmates heard the horrible story as related above, from the lips of a half-caste woman convert who spoke English fluently. Hall and his friends gazed upon the floor of the death-chamber, fully two inches deep with blood and gore and tufts of hair. They noted *tulwar* gashes in the walls the height of a woman's neck. Then they turned away, sick at heart, but swore to be avenged.

FORTY-FIVE miles away another desperate siege was being conducted. At Lucknow, one of the most beautiful cities in India, a handful of Englishmen were holding out against the fierce hordes of Sepoys who hemmed them in on every side.

Havelock set out for Lucknow with the greater part of his force, leaving Cawnpore in charge of Colonel Neill. Among others left behind under Neill were Hall and some of his shipmates. Quite naturally they were furious at not being permitted to accompany the first relief, but it was necessary to leave guns and men to hold Cawnpore.

They relieved the monotony of their situation and vented a part of their pent-up vengeance by forcing a number of high-caste Brahmin prisoners to clean up the blood-stained death-chamber. Men were set over them with whips to see that they did not shirk their task. The Brahmins, thus ceremoniously defiled, were then hanged and buried in a ditch.

As the world knows, General Havelock and his command reached the Residency at Lucknow in due time, after having been obliged to fall back upon Cawnpore by reason of the extreme heat and the dreaded cholera. The gallant Neill was with him when he finally succeeded in cutting his way into Lucknow, but the negro Hall and other bluejackets were not present. Their opportunity was to come later.

Havelock and his men, though strong enough to reinforce the besieged troops in Lucknow and save the English garrison from destruction, were not strong enough to cut their way to safety, hampered with women and children and wounded amounting to 1,500 souls. Thus the siege continued upon a larger scale.

Meanwhile, Sir Colin Campbell (Lord Clyde), the officer who had commanded the troops at the first presentation of the Victoria Cross, had arrived in India. He was to assume the chief command of the forces in India, and his first task was to rescue the garrison at Lucknow. Upon the 9th of November he led an army of five thousand men and thirty guns out of Cawnpore, and among these was the naval brigade under William Peel.

The Sikandarbagh, a formidable-looking structure about 130 yards square and surrounded by a thick brick wall about twenty feet high, was the first nut to crack before Lucknow could be relieved. It sheltered upward of two thousand well-armed Sepoys, who poured a galling fire into the English from the flat roof of a pavilion on top of the structure.

Little could be done until a breach had been made in the wall, so the infantry lay

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down and sheltered themselves as best they could while the men of the naval brigade dragged their guns up under the wall. Across the deadly zone of bare ground the negro and his shipmates dragged their guns as coolly as if laying alongside an enemy's frigate. Man after man dropped under the cruel fire until each gun was short-handed.

Once up under the wall, the gallant men were in a measure protected, but as the 24-pounders kicked back after each discharge, it became necessary for the men to enter the danger zone to drag them back into position. At each recoil the Sepoys concentrated their fire upon the little detachment, and each discharge cost a human life.

Encouraging his shipmates by his fearless example, the negro was always the first man to dart out of the sheltered angle to drag back his gun. He called upon them to remember the bloody room at Cawnpore. He seemed to bear a charmed life, and even paused at the risk of his life to grind his teeth and shake his fists at the Sepoys on the roof.

After an hour's perilous work, during which the detachment of bluejackets was all but wiped out, the 24-pounders succeeded in hammering a hole in the wall about three feet square. A bugle call sounded. The infantrymen sprang to their feet and rushed at the little hole in spite of the fact that certain death awaited the foremost.

The enemy, having been driven out of the courtyard by the intrepid English aided by the loyal native troops, made for the gateway of the main structure. As they attempted to close the heavy doors behind them, a Punjabi Mohammedan, Mukarrab Khan by name, thrust his left arm between them. As a *tulwar* nearly severed his hand at the wrist, he withdrew the wounded arm and immediately thrust in the other!

By this time, other men had reached the spot and torn the doors open. For this brave act, Mukarrab Khan was decorated with the Order of Merit, the Indian equivalent of the Victoria Cross.

MEANWHILE other serious work had been cut out for William Hall and the other bluejackets, for a thousand yards away, in the direction of the Residency, loomed the frowning outlines of the Shah Najaf, a white-domed tomb, surrounded by high walls of solid masonry. While the Highlanders tore off the roofs of the surrounding huts and drove the Sepoys before them like sheep, other troops were "remembering Cawnpore" while attending to the enemy in the Sikandarbagh, and the naval detachment dragged their guns into position before the Shah Najaf.

A solid shot from the enemy struck a naval ammunition wagon, exploding its contents. Hall, with the blood streaming down his face where a piece of shell had grazed him, stood by his gun and urged his fellow bluejackets on by word and deed.

Throughout the long afternoon the men hammered away at the twenty-foot wall. Gun after gun was abandoned as their crews were shot down, but the negro hero was game to the last. Shortly before dark the commander gave the order to collect the killed and wounded and retire for the night, but Hall had to be peremptorily ordered to retire by his superior before he obeyed.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Salmon of the naval brigade had climbed a tree and discovered a small aperture in the wall. The enemy saw him and volleyed at him. Badly wounded, he fell into the arms of his men and reported what he had seen. For this brave act he was rewarded with a Victoria Cross.

The English were quick to take advantage of the information, and among the first men to rush the breach was William Hall, wounded, but hacking right and left with his cutlass. Early upon the following morning, the Residency was relieved and a second massacre averted.

In due time, Hall received his Victoria Cross, as both his commanding officers and shipmates were agreed that his gallantry had been the most conspicuous event of a day memorable for its many brave actions.

Hall lived to take part in the bombardment of Alexandria many years later, and was awarded the Egyptian Medal and its inseparable companion, the Khedive's Star. With his Crimean and Egyptian medals, his Victoria Cross and Khedive's Star, this brave negro finally retired from service and took up his residence in a small Nova Scotian village, far away from the grim scenes of his early days.

In all, three negroes have been awarded the Victoria Cross: Samuel Hodge and W. J. Gordon of the West Indian Regiment,

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and William Hall of the Royal Navy; and possibly the bravest of these is the white-haired, black ex-captain of the foretop, William Hall, V. C.

THE DRUMMER BOY WHO GAINED A CROSS

ABOUT two months before the scene described above, the English forces under General Nicholson were assembled before the sacred city of Delhi, which had become a Sepoy stronghold shortly after the massacre of the handful of Europeans composing its garrison.

There had been no white troops in Delhi, with the exception of Lieutenant Willoughby and a handful of men who had charge of the great powder magazine and who blew it to atoms rather than let the ammunition fall into the hands of the enemy.

On the evening of the 13th of September, following a week of heavy cannonading in a vain effort to breach the city wall, word was passed around for the troops to be ready for the final assault at daybreak the next morning.

Scaling ladders were prepared, and the men looked carefully to their arms and attended to the filling of their water-flasks. Knowing that they would need extra protection for their heads while ascending the ladders, many of the men were busily engaged in tearing up cloth into strips for extra *pugrees* to wind about their caps and helmets.

In one corner of a shelter-tent lay a seventeen-year-old bugler, Robert Hawthorne by name. With a rag stuffed into the bell of his trumpet he was practising "mute" calls as calmly as if he were back at his regimental depot, seated upon the edge of his bunk. Across the way from him a group of older men of his regiment were gathered; the sound of snapping gun-locks, the ringing sound of ramrods thrust home, and the low hum of conversation reached the ears of the Londonderry lad where he lay. He could hardly foretell that before another day passed he would have earned a Victoria Cross.

An hour before daybreak a sentry from the guard roused him. Quickly donning his belt and cap, the young lad sounded the "rouse"; and then, after a brief interval, during which the men of the 52nd munched a piece of bread, the boy blew the call for assembly.

The story of Cawnpore had reached the troops before Delhi, and as the men fell in line ready for the assault, their officers noted with satisfaction a look of grim determination upon each man's face.

As it was still dark, the men and their arms were inspected by lantern-light; and then the orders and plan of assault were read out to them. The force was to be divided into three attacking columns, with a fourth column in reserve. Any officer or man wounded was to be left where he fell, as there were no men to spare until the walls should be carried. Should the assault be successful, the wounded would be borne away in *doolies*, or litters, after the fight. Should the assault fail, wounded and sound must be prepared to bear the worst. There was to be no plundering, but all authorized loot and treasure was to be placed in common stock for fair division after all was over. No prisoners were to be made, as there were no spare men to guard them. Great care was to be taken that no women or children were injured.

At this moment a Catholic priest appeared in his vestments and asked for permission to bless the troops before they marched away.

"We may differ, some of us, in the matter of religion," he said, "but surely the blessing of an old man and a clergyman can do nothing but good!"

The commanding officer readily assented and the old man, lifting his hands to heaven, blessed the troops in the most impressive manner and offered up a prayer for mercy on the souls so soon to die.

One by one the stars grew pale and faded away before the gray light of dawn. Slowly the sun rose over the hills until at last it appeared above the horizon. Then it was that General Nicholson, sitting on horseback, calm and immovable before Column 1, raised his hand with a stately gesture. It was the signal for the assault.

A great shout, fierce and menacing, broke from the men's throats, and the four columns moved swiftly upon Delhi. From every point along the walls the guns of the enemy burst into flame, and the shell and shot raked the ranks of the English and their loyal native allies. Onward the stormers rushed, losing comrades at every stride, but with every nerve intent upon their goal.

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NICHOLSON'S column found a small breach, scrambled speedily over the intervening ditch and at the point of the bayonet fought its way into the city. The second column was also successful at their point of attack. But Column 3, which included the 52nd Regiment of Foot and Robert Hawthorne, had more serious work cut out for it, for it had been told to storm the Kashmir Gate after the engineers had blown it in.

Lieutenants Home and Salkeld of the Royal Engineers, Sergeants Carmichael and Smith, together with Corporal Burgess and a dozen sappers and miners were told off to blow in the gate. Bugler Hawthorne was instructed to accompany the party and sound the advance when all was ready.

While the rest of the column waited under cover, this small band of heroes ran toward the gate, each officer and man bearing a 25-pound sack of gunpowder. The enemy, at first astounded at the audacity of the small band, soon scented the nature of the errand and opened up a vicious series of volleys.

The bridge over the ditch in front of the gateway had been destroyed and it was with great difficulty that the single beam which remained could be crossed. Sergeant Carmichael was killed and several of the men wounded while attaching the powder-bags to the gate. The last man had scarcely dumped down his bag before the gate, when a perfect blaze of musketry wilted the little band. Hawthorne, as cool as if on parade, waited for the explosion with his trumpet at his lips, ready to sound the call.

Lieutenant Salkeld, in an attempt to fire the train, dropped with a bullet through both an arm and a leg. Making a supreme effort, he handed the slow-match to Corporal Burgess; and as the latter touched the match to the fuse, he fell back, mortally wounded. With a hiss, the fire ate its way along the fuse. The seventeen-year-old boy sprang forward in time to drag the wounded lieutenant away from the gate; then there was a blinding flash and a roar as the powder exploded and blew in the wicket.

High and clear, the notes of Hawthorne's bugle rang above the uproar at the gate. Three times successively he sounded the 52nd's "regimental call," the "advance," and the "double," fearful lest he should not be heard plainly. He was answered with a cheer; and as the men of his regiment "doubled" to the wicket with loaded guns and fixed bayonets, the first men to pierce the veil of smoke came upon Hawthorne.

His instructions carried out, he had turned his attention to Lieutenant Salkeld. Tearing into strips the *pugree* from around his helmet, he had fashioned a pair of tourniquets, and bound them around the bleeding limbs of the engineer hero, totally unconscious that he was himself a hero. It may be worth while to add that the head of the wounded man had been comfortably pillowed upon *a sack of gunpowder* dropped by a wounded sapper in the race for the gate!

The walls of the sacred city gained, several days of stiff fighting followed before the English captured the last of the Mogul emperors and put his sons to death. During these bloody days the 52nd Regiment suffered severe losses, the English forces being outnumbered three to one. A remnant of it was invalided home to England at a later date, and of the thrilling stories of the Indian Mutiny related by these men none so stirred the pulses of the listeners as the tale of the blowing in of the Kashmir Gate at Delhi, where young Hawthorne won—and richly deserved—his cross.

"BOBS,"—HIS CROSS; AND HIS SON WHO DIED TO WIN

BARON ROBERTS, of Kandahar and Waterford, has the insignia of the Order of the Garter. It was presented to him by Queen Victoria about two weeks before her death. When the German Emperor came to London to attend the funeral he was pleased to decorate Lord Roberts with the Order of the Black Eagle. The gallant Irish soldier of Indian nativity has also received the thanks of the British Parliament together with a grant of 100,000 pounds sterling; and is entitled to the letters K. C. B., G. C. B., G. C. I. E., G. C. S. I., and K. P.

Best of all, he is affectionately known to every soldier in the British army as "Bobs." He is also the proud wearer of a Victoria Cross, and the possessor of a second cross for which his only son stained the South African veldt with his life-blood.

The idol of the British army was but a lieutenant when he won his cross in the bloody days of the Indian Mutiny, and at the time was serving on the staff of Sir Colin Campbell, the Commander-in-Chief

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of the British Forces in India. He had already been mentioned in dispatches, had been wounded, and also knocked over by the "windage" of a round shot.

A column was moving upon Fategarh to restore order through a strip of disordered territory, so that communication might be opened up between the Punjab and Bengal. Riding with the horse artillery and cavalry, "Bobs" came upon a large body of the enemy occupying the village of Khundaganj. It became necessary to dislodge and destroy this force if possible, as it was understood that in the ranks of this particular body of Sepoys were many who had taken a more or less prominent part in the Cawnpore slaughter.

Three guns were pushed across a partly destroyed suspension bridge over a stream. They engaged the enemy while planks were laid across the stringers for the passage of the main body of the column.

Fearful lest Sir Colin Campbell should favor the Highlanders by ordering them to lead, the 53rd Regiment, composed mostly of impulsive Irishmen, charged the village without waiting for orders. Nothing remained but to support them.

As the yelling troops advanced upon the village calling upon one another to "Remember Cawnpore!" the Sepoys wavered, then hastily limbered up their guns and retired. This gave the mounted troops an opportunity to follow up the retreat and inflict a summary punishment.

"Threes left—trot—march!" came the order.

And with "Bobs" well in the vanguard, the 9th Lancers led the pursuit. When within three hundred yards of the Sepoys the "charge" was sounded, and within another minute came the shock. Seven guns were taken within five minutes.

The line thundered on, overtaking groups of the enemy, who every few moments paused to kneel and fire into the British. Finally the last body was overtaken. The Sepoys halted and fired a volley at close range.

Lieutenant Younghusband, riding near "Bobs," fell; but the future field marshal could not ride to his assistance at that moment, for close by him a Sepoy was attacking one of his men with a fixed bayonet. With a stroke of his saber "Bobs" put the Sepoy out of commission and was about to give his attention to the fallen officer when he saw two Sepoys running away with a regimental standard in their possession.

Putting spurs to his horse, he overtook the mutineers and ran one of them through. He was wrenching the flag out of the hand of the man he had cut down, when the other Sepoy placed the muzzle of his musket close to Roberts' breast, and pulled the trigger. Fortunately for the gallant lieutenant it missed fire, and he lived not only to receive the Victoria Cross from the hands of the Queen at Buckingham Palace in June of 1859, but also to receive from the same hands, some forty years later, a Victoria Cross awarded to his dead son, killed upon the battle-field of Colenso in a desperate attempt to save a battery from falling into the hands of the Boers.

THE death of his gallant son happened in the following manner:

Colonel Long, with two batteries of the Royal Field Artillery, had pressed forward to drive the Boers from their trenches upon the banks of the Tugela. He found the Boers strongly entrenched and in great numbers—greater than he had been led to expect. A wicked fire decimated the ranks of the batteries as the Boer marksmen opened up on them. Through a slight misunderstanding, reinforcements failed to arrive; and in the face of the deadly fire the British retreated, leaving twelve guns in the hands of the enemy.

Among the officers on Buller's staff was Lieutenant Roberts of the King's Royal Rifles, an only son of the popular commander-in-chief. He, together with Corporal Nurse, Lieutenant Congreve and Captain Reed, responded to Captain Schofield's call for volunteers for a desperate and well-nigh hopeless effort to regain the guns. Covered by the fire of three regiments of infantry and followed by a few teamsters, the son of "Bobs" galloped up to the deserted guns a few hundred yards away from the Boer trenches.

The teamsters hooked on to two of the guns and dragged them back to safety. A second sortie was made in the face of almost certain death, when the Boer artillery came into play and found the range.

Young Roberts, his horse straining every tendon to take the lead, had just looked over his shoulder to laugh at Schofield because the latter could not keep up. At that

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instant a large shell burst close by the gallant fellow, and he went down even as he laughed.

Major Babtie, of the Royal Army Medical Corps, crawled out after him, picked him up in his arms and carried him back through the hail of bullets, thereby himself winning the Victoria Cross.

The attempt to retrieve the guns was abandoned. Ten of them were left in the hands of the Boers; and by the time Buller came to his senses and gave up the battle which ensued, 1,100 men were lost. Two days later, upon the 17th of December, 1899, young Roberts died; and upon the 10th day of the following January his father disembarked at Cape Town to unravel the South African snarl.

The attempt to regain the guns at Colenso resulted in six Victoria Crosses. Of these, five were destined to be worn by living men. The sixth was handed to the father at a private audience at Osborne, the last audience given by Queen Victoria before her death, which took place eight days later. An unofficial account of the interview states that the eyes of the Queen were filled with tears as she handed the bit of bronze to "Bobs" and spoke to him of his well-beloved son as only a mother who has loved and lost one can.

THE "SKY-PILOT" AND OTHERS

YEARS before the only son of "Bobs" gave up his life, his father, at that time in command of the Kabul Field Force, had a chaplain attached to his column, the Reverend James Williams Adams, B.A. The British were near Kabul, avenging the foul murder of their agent, Cavagnari.

Attacked by the Afghans under Mohammed Jan, the British were forced to retreat. Ammunition was short, and the guns of the British had been advanced too far. A *nullah* at least twelve feet deep, narrowing toward the bottom and full of water, had to be crossed. The Afghans had the range to a nicety, and the retreat almost turned into a stampede.

With the faint hope of being able to save the guns which had become stuck in the *nullah*, "Bobs" ordered the 9th Lancers to charge the ditch, and to spike the guns in case it were impossible to save them. With the utmost gallantry, the men of the 9th charged the ditch, but to no useful purpose. Orders were given to unhook the horses and spike the guns.

The chaplain, mounted on a magnificent mare, hovered near by. Suddenly he perceived a wounded lancer staggering toward him. He dismounted and assisted the wounded man into the saddle. At that instant the animal bolted, and the *padre* was left on foot, the target for a thousand Afghan rifles!

Far from running back to the shelter of the British lines, the plucky "sky-pilot" kept on toward the ditch, where he saw a couple of mounted men in trouble. Their horses had rolled over on them, they had become entangled in their trappings, and were in danger of drowning. Without a moment's hesitation, the chaplain plunged into the ditch and slashed the men clear with his pocket-knife.

A man of fine physique and extraordinary strength, he pulled them out by a magnificent effort and helped them up to the top of the slimy bank. Amidst a veritable storm of lead, the three men gained the British lines unscathed; and the Reverend James Williams Adams had demonstrated that an army chaplain can do other things than preach when an occasion offers.

Upon the recommendation of "Bobs," under whose eye he had performed the daring feats, the "sky-pilot" preceded the B.A. after his name with the significant letters V.C. He subsequently retired to a quiet vicarage in Norfolk, where he died in 1903, the only clergyman up to date to receive a Victoria Cross.

IN WRITING of these heroes of the Cross, it would not be fair to dismiss the subject without mentioning the exploits of Field Marshal Sir George Stuart White, who in 1879 won a cross, and the following year was awarded a clasp in addition, equivalent to a second cross.

White, who succeeded "Bobs" as commander-in-chief in India, became an ensign of the 27th Inniskilling Regiment in 1853. Ten years later he became a captain in the famous 92nd Regiment of Gordon Highlanders. A major in 1879, he and his regiment formed part of the avenging column ordered to Afghanistan to punish the murderers of Cavagnari.

At the battle of Charasiah, with a mere handful of Highlanders, he won his first cross and undying fame by charging a

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strongly fortified hill. The men in the kilts were outnumbered in the proportion of ten to one; but inspired by their gallant major, they pressed on and captured the position, much to the surprise and satisfaction of General "Bobs."

A year later, during the famous trot of the 10,000 from Kabul to Kandahar, it became necessary to take an Afghan position. A battery of screw guns had been shelling the Afghans for some time without tangible results. Supported by a regiment of fighting Gurkash, the Highlanders scampered up the hill behind Major White. At the point of the bayonet they drove the Afghans away from their guns; and the first man into the enclosure was the gallant major who lived to become a field marshal.

Years later, he defended Ladysmith throughout a siege lasting one hundred and ten days, and delighted the British public by his stern refusal to entertain Sir Redvers Buller's suggestion that he surrender to the Boers.

THE Sudanese wars have been productive of crosses. Likewise the Ashanti campaign, and the trouble in Zululand, where two hundred and forty English held off ten thousand Zulus at Rorke's Drift. The struggle against the brave and determined Boers resulted in many other crosses besides the four awarded to the party of which the only son of "Bobs" was a member. Typical of the deeds of 1899–1902, is the case of Sergeant Lawrence of the 17th "Death or Glory" Lancers.

Lawrence was in charge of a small party of lancers doing patrol work in the neighborhood of Lindberg. The main column in pursuit of De Wet was some distance away. Suddenly, without any warning, the half-dozen men were surprised by a party of fourteen well-armed and determined Boers. The patrol retreated as a matter of course.

Bowled over by a well-directed bullet, Private Hayward's horse crumpled up, and the rider was thrown to the ground. Hayward sustained a dislocated shoulder and a broken collar-bone. Sergeant Lawrence pulled up his horse and dismounted. He then placed the injured man across the saddle, and prodded the horse with the muzzle of his carbine. The animal immediately galloped away with the disabled trooper, leaving Lawrence to fight it out on foot.

Lawrence lay on his belly and opened up on the Boers with the magazine of his Lee-Metford. He then retreated for fifty yards or so, and then repeated the performance. Strange to say, he lived to gain the English lines, and to make it up with the horse for the unexplained dig in the ribs. Which all goes to show that the men of the 17th Lancers have not undergone any substantial change since the days of Balaklava.

Space will not permit a detailed account of the five hundred and odd other brave acts which won and deserved a Victoria Cross, to say nothing of the Distinguished Service Order, a decoration on the same lines, save that its recipients must needs be commissioned officers. This latter order of military merit was instituted also by Queen Victoria in 1868, in order to "recognize the special service of officers in the army and navy."

No one can foretell when or where the next batch of Victoria Crosses will be won. If, as some proclaim, we are on the verge of a universal peace, the last cross has been awarded; for it must be borne in mind that the cross must be earned "by some signal act of devotion or valour *in the presence of the enemy*."

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The Easy Mark

by Edward Childs Carpenter

CHAPTER I

THE BIRTH OF A GENIUS

GENIUS is an infinite capacity for taking pains, the gold-cure, or anything that can be pawned. It is caviar to the general, birdshot to the man in the ranks, the boast of old age, the boost of youth. Like the measles, it is best to have it early and get it out of your system; for if it doesn't land you in jail it will strand you on a park bench or marry you to a rich wife with a touch-proof disposition.

Not so very long ago, in the days when I used a razor more as an instrument of encouragement than necessity, I suspected that genius hived in my soul; and I have no doubt it would have buzzed its brief hour there unadvertised and unsung and passed neatly away without causing any anxiety to the Board of Health or the Interstate Commerce Commission, had it not been for Julius B. Leffingwell, who discovered it, caught it and trained it to make a noise like an actor.

Flattery is the banana-peel on which genius skids from the straight and narrow path. Leffingwell found me decorating a high stool as bookkeeper in the office of that respectable firm of contractors who swindled the city under the name of B. F. & J. M. McGowen. He so beguiled me that I slid, with the slippery ease of a seal, from my lofty perch into the unfiltered waters of the tank-drama.

He strutted into the office one glad Spring morning, doffed a limp sombrero and, hanging his sword—I mean his cane—on his arm, draped himself over the rail. He was an affable but lean and hungry-looking, smooth-faced, middle-aged chantecler with a sharp and prominent beak, a thin but wide smile, and long hair combed militantly above a serious brow. He had the genuine Booth-look, the perfervid, dramatic manner, the undulating voice and finely chiseled enunciation which set him apart from the casual human flock and herded him with the panoplied elks.

He began by doing me a favor—introduced me to a complete set of Shakespeare in thirty inoculations.

"By profession I am an ac-tor," he explained; "but having temporarily closed my season, I am employing my leisure by elevating the stage through the medium of

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this superb edition of the sublime works of the Immortal Bard of Av-on!"

While displaying a sample volume, which he had frisked with a flourish from the tails of his frock coat, he regaled me with recitations. "Sparks from the great rôles," he called them, rôles in which he had appeared "with prodigious success before crowded houses" in obsolete towns, whose unfamiliar names he sounded with all the pomp and circumstance befitting the mention of Hoboken, Constantinople and Tierra del Fuego.

Although I was not on speaking terms with the metropoli of his tours, I had at least a spouting acquaintance with one of the speeches in his repertoire; and to prove my maxillary dexterity, I ran Hamlet's soliloquy through my personal pianola on the high gear.

"Egad, my boy!" claimed Leffingwell, lifting his huge eyebrows. "You have histrionic talent! It's marvelous, marvelous!"

When all Gall was divided into three parts, Napoleon—or whoever it was that did the dividing—handed down two parts elsewhere and the other one to me. Without a quiver of hesitation, I conceded that I had genius, but as to whether it was histrionic or not, I hadn't decided.

Leffingwell had no doubt about it.

"Who taught you to read the soliloquy in that finished manner?" he asked.

"Nobody!" I rejoined. "I just absorbed it!"

"Incredible!" One eyebrow arched itself like a belligerent cat, the other fluctuated in amazement. "Oh, my boy, it's a pity, a crime that you who have such an instinct for dramaturgic effect should waste your genius in this mundane atmosphere!" He flung out a flexible arm in a gesture that put a curse upon every stick of furniture in the office.

There was nothing to argue about. I knew that he was right. I was only at a loss to know how I should set about being an actor.

Leffingwell lapsed into a pose of profound meditation, from which he emerged with an intense start.

"It could be done!" He pursed his lips into a dubious expression and then slowly unfolded them into a benevolent smile. "If you are seriously inclined, I myself might undertake to prepare you for the stage!"

He silenced my surge of gratitude with a kingly wave of his hand and, delicately deprecating the necessity of placing my tutelage on a sound business basis, shamed me into closing a deal for three nightly lessons a week at two dollars each.

When he had left the office, I found that I had collaterally, so to speak, signed a bond to take the set of Shakespeare, and by an apparently painless operation been separated from a ten-spot, the first payment on account of said works.

I foresaw that, having to pay my board, my dues in the Bedrock Building Association, my instalments on Shakespeare and my tutor in dramatic culture, I should have to economize at least upon my wash.

Only for an instant did this thought o'ershadow the mellifluent vista of my future greatness, for in an instant all sordid considerations side-stepped before the radiant, hypnotic suggestion of the card I held in my hand. It read:

Julius B. Leffingwell
Starring
Leffingwell's Associated Players
Permanent Address: *The Clipper*

"One day," thought I, "I, too, shall flash a card like that!"

JUST as abstinence makes the thirst grow stronger, so did the waiting hours whet my palate for a gulp at the fountain of dramatic lore.

Seeking Leffingwell in his lair, I found him—all to the merino—inhabiting a small but messy room over the rear of a cut-rate grocery that looked as though it dealt chiefly in germs. There I received a violent but smiling welcome. The tragedian jujitsued me into a chair and took up a strategic position between me and the door. After slipping me a line of small and early talk about the gravity of genius, he seemed satisfied that I was not contemplating escape, yielded me the floor and deposited his attenuated person upon the bed. From that vantage he smoked my cigars and directed my evolutions, gymnastic and vocalistic.

"It's marvelous," he said, "how quickly you learn. I am proud of you, proud of you, my boy. You have a future!"

"I don't think I'll need many lessons," I remarked as I was going.

"Probably not a great many; but that

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depends—that depends! *Au revoir*! Until Friday, my boy, Friday!"

On the occasion of my second lesson Leffingwell and I began the discussion of an engagement. My idea was that I should accept nothing less than leading business—perhaps with Julia Marlowe; but I had rather, I thought, play my first season under Belasco's management.

Leffingwell had no doubt that "Davy," as he called him, would be glad to engage me, but advised me to leave open the question of my début for a little while. His manager, he said, was thinking of taking the Leffingwell Associated Players out for a Spring tour, and while I could not be given the stellar rôle, it would be well for me to accept some other responsible part for the sake of experience. I wasn't thrilled by this prospect, but I realized that my genius—no matter how lowly it was cast—would outshine even the searchlight of the star.

KEEN as a fighting-edge ground in Berlin I went on with my high and lofty instruction in elocution and stage deportment; and a week later I found the only chair in Leffingwell's room occupied by a smallish but sizable, rotund, ageless person whose infantile features were huddled together in the center of his large and circular countenance, like a pyramid of performing seals in a one-ringed circus. He had an air of being familiar with fanciers and financiers; moreover, his manners suggested the suavity of a barkeeper and the nonchalance of a chef. He wore a medium-done, brown derby on the back of a moth-eaten, manila head, and a roomy, checked suit which terminated in a pair of gray spats and amber shoes.

"Mr. Smink, I have the honor of presenting you to my manager, Mr. Gustave Pierpont," said Leffingwell with a melodeon voice and a graceful flip of the hand as he rose from the bed and placed an arm about my shoulder.

Pierpont gave me a moist and chubby grip.

"Mr. Smink," added the tragedian, "is the talented young man of whom I have just been speaking."

Pierpont eyed me critically for an instant. "You've got a fine, malleable face for the stage," he declared.

"More malleable than Mansfield's," chipped in Leffingwell.

"Yes, but you oughter change your name. Smink sounds like a plumber."

The manager thoughtfully dug at his nails with a toothpick. "What's your front name?"

"Rudolph!"

"That's not so bad as an entrée, eh, Julius?" appealed Pierpont, while I, confident that they would baptize me properly, sat down on a trunk by the window. "But we want something rechurchy for a chaser!"

"What do you say to Rudolph Runnymede?" submitted Leffingwell.

The other shook his head. "Runnymede? Too much like a soft drink! I was thinking of Barretsford. Listens like a star to me!"

"Admirable! Admirable!" ejaculated Leffingwell. "Barret, Barrymore, Barretsford! It not only sounds distinguished, but it would look metropolitan on the road."

"It's all to the Tiffany!" decided Pierpont.

"You couldn't do better," said Leffingwell, turning to me. "Mr. Pierpont is a perfect genius in the way of publicity. Hammerstein offered him a tremendous salary to take charge of his press bureau, but Gus prefers to be independent."

So then and there I became Rudolph Barretsford. I felt as though my spirit had burst from the commercial cocoon of Smink and emerged the glorious butterfly Barretsford. I thanked them both and remarked that I would try to live up to the dramatic quality of my name.

"Speaking of dramatic quality," put in Leffingwell, "I wish Mr. Sm— Mr. Barretsford that you would recite 'The Face on the Barroom Floor,' for Mr. Pierpont. It's a little more in character with the part he has in mind for you than *Hamlet's* soliloquy."

"The Face on the Barroom Floor" was one of the few recitations outside of Shakespeare which really gave my genius full play. I planted myself on the strip of rag carpet, lying between the bed and the washstand, and reeled off that palpitating panegyric in my best manner. When I finished, face-down on the carpet, dramatizing the line, "he fell across the picture de-dead!" I heard a sob and, looking up, saw Pierpont wiping his eyes with a pink-bordered handkerchief.

Quickly mastering his emotion, the man-

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ager said, "I didn't think it was in you, Mr. Barretsford, to get under my skin like that!"

"I told you that he had genius!" cried Leffingwell triumphantly.

"Old man, I want to shake hands with you!" enthused Pierpont. "You've got the Warfield heart-clutch!"

I could only agree with him.

Leffingwell leaned over the footboard of the bed and nodded his head approvingly. "I hope you noticed his voice, Gus."

"Did I!" inflected the other. "It's as sympathetic as Forbes-Robertson's, and while it isn't as heavy as John Drew's, it has more carrying quality than—than——"

"Willard's," supplied the star.

"I fancied my style rather favored Sothern's," I suggested, not wishing to be thought puffed up by their praise.

Pierpont turned away suddenly with a fit of coughing.

"I'm afraid Gus hasn't recovered from that cold he caught coming over on the *Mauretania* last week," remarked Leffingwell, glancing solicitously at the manager. "And by the by," he added, "what salary would you want, Mr. Sm— Mr. Barretsford, to go on the road with us?"

That was something I hadn't made a close study of, but I craftily replied that I would accept the wages of a first-class star.

Leffingwell demurred. "At first you should be willing to accept a trifle less—say fifty dollars per."

"Per," I naturally supposed meant "per week." Since then I have discovered that it has no particular significance. "Per" is not even a promise. It's merely a promiscuous expression of endearment, like "dear sir," or "yours truly." But at the moment, fifty per struck me as being colossal, for on the surface it was an increase of many hundred per cent. over my clerical stipend. Concealing my satisfaction, I rejoined that I would be willing to begin at fifty dollars per.

"Then that's settled!"

Leffingwell displayed such evident relief that I kicked myself for not insisting upon fifty-five or sixty per.

Pierpont, who had finally recovered himself and was now busily bandaging a fractured perfecto with a piece of newspaper, turned a troubled eye upon the tragedian. "Julius, you shouldn't have closed with Mr. Barretsford offhand that way without consulting me. I've already engaged Henry Miller for the part."

Leffingwell had apparently forgotten that circumstance. "I'm sorry," he sighed, "but I won't break my contract with Mr. Barretsford. You'll have to give Miller his two weeks' notice."

"Two weeks?" snorted the manager, savagely chewing at his decrepit cigar; "four weeks and with full salary—none of your two-week clauses for Henry!"

For an instant I was afraid I was going to be sidetracked for an actor who had never even played *Macbeth*, but Leffingwell stood by me.

"I can't expect you to forfeit two hundred dollars, Gus," said he; "but I have promised Mr. Barretsford that part. He'll make a tremendous hit in it, and if my money wasn't tied up in the hands of the receiver for the Immunity Trust & Safe Deposit Company, I'd cheerfully buy Miller off myself."

"I have several hundred dollars in the Bedrock Building Association, in addition to some odd sums in bank," I announced with the air of an owner of millions. "Suppose I draw a couple of hundred, would you permit me to buy up Mr. Miller's contract?"

Pierpont wagged his head. "You'd better keep your coin, and let Miller keep his contract. You'll probably get another part just as fat next Fall when we open our regular tour."

"But I don't want to wait until next Fall," I protested.

"Can't help it, old man. It's against my business proclivities to sell one actor's contract to another. Besides, Henry's a friend of mine and simply panting to play the part."

Leffingwell rose from the bed and laid a hand on his manager's shoulder. "For my sake, Gus," he interceded, "break your rule in this instance. Think what it means to Mr. Barretsford! I know how it hurts you to discharge an actor like Miller, to throw him out of an engagement at this season, but he'll understand that you had to do it to please me."

"Well, since you put it that way——"

Leffingwell wheeled about to me and grasped my hand. "It's all right, my boy! He's given in! Congratulations!"

That night I began to let my hair grow.

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CHAPTER II

"GOLDEN GULCH"

DEEPLY impressed with the euphonious sound of my *nom de théâtre*, and highly elated at my success in snatching an important rôle from under the nose of such a famous actor as Henry Miller, I served notice on the Bedrock Building Association that I wanted my entire account—something over $400—for I didn't know but what I'd be put to a little expense for a theatrical wardrobe. And two weeks later I paid over the $200 to Pierpont and put the balance in bank, bringing up my deposit to about $300.

A few days after I had parted with my $200, Leffingwell placed in my hands the typewritten part of the character I was cast for in "Golden Gulch," the play selected for the Spring tour of the Leffingwell Associated Players.

"We've given you *Deacon Crawford*," said the star, "which is really the leading rôle, though of course my name, in the character of *Gerald Dangerfield*, the young mining engineer, will head the bill. The *Deacon* isn't very long, but it's exceedingly fat. You have an enormous scene in the first act, where you go mad and see your dead wife in a dream; and there's another striking bit in the last act. There you are restored to reason in time to foil the villain and bestow the hand of your adopted child, *Nugget Nora*, upon me. Its possibilities are simply prodigious!"

Inspired by Leffingwell's enthusiasm, I hopefully reported for rehearsal the following night at the Royal Arcade hall, up four flights over a meat-market.

The members of the company were sprawled in knots and other poses on the benches. For the most part, they looked more like fugitives from an asylum than followers of Thespis; but I tried to put them at their ease with a few well-frozen words of condescension, as Leffingwell paraded me before them—all but the leading lady, who, after the manner of her kind, was entitled to be late.

There were two female and four male actors besides Leffingwell and Pierpont. The latter I learned was comedian as well as manager of the Associated Players. Treffer, the juvenile man—tall and thin as a paper-cutter, with a head of hair like a huge powder-puff which had first been marcelled and then shellacked—was the real rhinestone of the collection. He was adorned like a lily of the alley, in a white yachting cap and pumps and green clothes. Very jaunty, very much infatuated with himself, he twirled a bamboo stick and flirted a pair of chamois gloves.

Walgrime, the heavy man, had a fine set of gold teeth and an engaging way of listening while you told him what a good actor you were, but he was evidently not unacquainted with the venerable ritual of the Saturday-night soak. Browleigh, the second heavy, was a trifle more tidy. He had the manners of a worm, but his vestments knew no modesty. They possessed all the variety and clamor of the Italian flag and a bowl of chop suey.

Clutters, the utility and property person, had the air of a pugilist, the voice of a huckster and the clothes of a mendicant. In his boisterous way he asked me if I were the "angel" of the outfit, but before I could question what he meant, Leffingwell dragged me away to present me to the Alderney-looking Mrs. Bellows—stage mothers was her line; and to the ingénue, Eugenie Sinclair, a scrawny brunette with a pair of yellow eyes and a pie-crust complexion.

By the time I had made the rounds of the company it was past eight o'clock, and Pierpont, cursing the tardy leading lady, suggested that Leffingwell should start the rehearsal without her.

We were about half-way through the first act before she arrived. She was a wonderful creature—a combination of Billy Burke and Maude Adams. She had a stunning little figure and a face that was more than pretty; it was exquisite. Her blue eyes, round and set wide apart, fairly glowed, and her mouth! I think I fell in love with her mouth on the instant—it curved so provokingly. She peeled off a tailor-made coat of gray material in a business-like way as she entered, and stripped her hands of long suède gloves, showing a perfect wrist and an alluring bit of round white arm. Everything about her, from the neat white stock and jabot at her throat to the buckled pumps on her little feet, was crisp and dainty.

With a smiling word of apology for her lateness and a bright nod of greeting to the company, which even included me, she

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briskly turned the pages of her part, found the place and plunged into rehearsal. Her polite and contagious energy, her cheerful way of taking the center of the stage and keeping it as though by divine right, her indiscriminate dispensation of *camaraderie*, put every one in good spirits and injected the first sign of animation into the proceedings.

When we finished the first act, Leffingwell linked arms with her, in what seemed to me an odiously familiar fashion, and beckoning to me, said, "Jeanne, my dear, permit me to introduce you to Mr. Barretsford. Mr. Barretsford—Miss De Angelus!"

With an adorable smile, Jeanne placed her hand in mine.

"Think of you, Mr. Barretsford, playing my father!" This in a caressing mezzo voice. "You ought to be doing the juvenile."

"I'm just taking Henry Miller's place for the Spring season," I elucidated.

Her eyes went wide at this remark. "Really?" she gasped.

"Yes," explained Leffingwell hastily. "We gave Miller his notice and put in Mr. Barretsford. It's just a temporary arrangement. In the Fall he's going out in *Hamlet!*"

Of course I knew that ultimately I would play *Hamlet*, but I did not know until that moment precisely when I should appear as the Melancholy Dane. Not in the least confused, however, by this piece of unexpected good news, I said, "I shall *begin* with *Hamlet!*"

"Isn't that bully!" enthused Jeanne. "I'm dying to play *Ophelia!*"

"Perhaps Mr. Barretsford could arrange to give you the part, my dear," suggested Leffingwell, appealing to me.

"You can not only have *Ophelia*, but all the heroines in my repertoire," I declared, inwardly all aflutter at the thought of playing love-scenes with that delectable creature.

While Jeanne was telling me how she intended to dress *Ophelia* in the mad scene, Leffingwell called, "Second act!" and, as he rushed right through the play after that, I had little opportunity to improve my acquaintance with the leading lady, or to get my bearings in the drama. Indeed, it was not until we came to the dress rehearsal, a week later, that I was able to piece the play together in my mind.

The star, however, was thoroughly satisfied. "We'll break the back of the play in the next two rehearsals," he declared to Pierpont. "I think you can safely book us to open at Angora a week from Saturday night."

CHAPTER III

FIVE IN A TAXI

FROM the viewpoint of our first rehearsal, I couldn't think that we would be ready to give a public performance inside of a month.

"Are you sure you'll be in shape to open a week from to-morrow night?" I asked, edging up to the star and his manager, who were seated on a bench, studying a row of figures which Pierpont had set down on the back of an envelope.

"There's no doubt about that," answered Leffingwell.

"It's a melon!" added the manager. "And as for Angora—that town has its tongue hanging out for our show!"

"The piece is a little rough in places—lacks the majesty of Shakespeare—but it's replete with heart-interest, isn't it, Mr. Barretsford?" appealed Leffingwell.

While I was trying to make up my mind what to reply, Pierpont slapped his knee and exclaimed. "It's a knock-out! I'm glad I didn't let Klaw & Erlanger in on this deal."

"Did they want an interest in it?" I questioned humbly.

"Did they? Ask Julius!" The comedian-manager turned the query over to his star with an affluent wave of his fat hand.

Leffingwell smiled on one side of his face and wrinkled up his long nose knowingly.

"My boy, as soon as Erlanger heard what we were up to, he sent for me. 'Julius,' says he—he always calls me Julius—'Julius,' says he, 'why not give me a half interest in your new piece? We'll book you for forty weeks in week-stands only, and put you into the New Amsterdam for a run at Christmas.'

"'Abe, old pal,' I rejoins, 'I'd like to give you a share in our enterprise, but Gus and I don't need your backing or your booking. There's more money, as you know, in the one-night stands, and we're not splitting profits with anybody. And if it comes to getting time for a run on Broadway, Lee

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Shubert said to me only yesterday that Daly's was at my disposal.'

"That sort of made him hot. 'Julius,' says Abe, 'if you book with the opposition, I'll never forgive you.' 'Well, Abe,' I pacifies him, 'Gus may drop in and talk over the route we want just as soon as our plans are settled.'"

During this confidential palaver the company were leaving the hall. I was about to follow them when Pierpont stopped me.

"By the way, Mr. Barretsford," he began, clearing his throat, "I forgot to ask you for the customary deposit."

"Deposit?" I puzzled.

"Perhaps you didn't know that it is the rule, as soon as rehearsals have been inaugurated, for the members of a company to deposit four weeks' salary with the management," explained Leffingwell.

I had never heard of such a thing, but of course I didn't know the rules.

"We're only going to touch—ask you for two weeks' salary, a hundred dollars," added Pierpont; "but you mustn't squeal to any of the members of the company—they've all got to put up the regular four weeks' deposit."

"I'm much obliged," I remarked, "but why do you require a deposit?"

Pierpont smiled and wagged his head, evidently surprised at my ignorance. "It—it's always done!"

"You should be more explicit, Gus," admonished the star. "Mr. Barretsford wants to know the reason why a deposit is necessary. Tell him!"

"Well, the fact is—that——" Gus hesitated, seemingly at a loss for the right word.

Leffingwell supplied it. "The fact is that actors have a way of leaving you in the midst of rehearsals and——"

"And we must have some hold on 'em," finished Pierpont. "It's the only way we can keep 'em from ducking their contracts."

"When do you return the deposit?" I asked.

"At the end of the season, of course!" answered Leffingwell. "We'll give you a receipt for the money when you pay it over to us to-morrow night. And, by the way, I want to compliment you on the sincerity of your conception of the *Deacon*. You're going to give a great performance—a great performance, isn't he, Gus?"

Gus was sure of it, so sure of it that he thought they ought to raise my salary, but I—thinking of the deposit—told them that I'd rather they waited until I had actually proved my ability.

"Well spoken, my boy!" approved Leffingwell. "You have the true artistic spirit."

With a dab at my shoulder and the suggestion that I should not forget to slip Gus the money privately on the following night, he advised me to go home and get my beauty-sleep.

When I reached the foot of the stairs I found Jeanne standing at the street door, her skirts gathered about her, looking anxiously out at the night, which was completely filled with rain, giving the street an appearance at once damp and dubious. Even to my inexperienced eye it was no place for a leading lady in patent leather pumps and open-work stockings.

"Isn't it fierce!" commented Jeanne. "And not a cab in sight!"

"What are you going to do?" I asked, trembling a little, for the light in the vestibule was very low and she was very lovely, and I was very young and standing very close beside her.

She flashed her headlights on me and I could see nothing, hear nothing, think of nothing—only vibrate with the gyrations of my heart. At last, as from a distance, her voice came purringly to me:

"I don't know, unless you'd be sweet enough to run around the corner to the drug store—there's always a drug store around the corner somewhere—and 'phone for a taxi."

Taxicabs were hitherto beyond my dreams of extravagance, looked upon with awe and wrath, but I did not hesitate. Telling Jeanne to stand a little back from the doorway, out of the draught, I dashed into the rain and began hunting for the drug store. That must have been an exceedingly healthy section of the city. The drug stores were as shy as the night police of Chicago. After scurrying around in the downpour for a quarter of an hour, I found a telephone in an oyster saloon, and drippingly ordering the taxi to call at the Royal Arcade Market House, I returned triumphant to the leading lady.

"Your highness's coach will be here anon!" I announced with a certain air of familiarity, as I splashed into the hallway.

"Are you wet?" inquired Jeanne affably.

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"Wet? Oh, no! Just a trifle moist," I gulped, paddling about in my own puddle.

"But you are sopping! I'm so sorry! If I'd known how hard it was raining and how far it was to a 'phone, I'd never, never have let you go!"

"You couldn't have stopped me," I declared gallantly. "My only regret is that I shall have but one suit of clothes to press in your service!"

Jeanne gave me a perfectly pulverizing glance of appreciation, and issued the following proclamation set to music:

"Mr. Barretsford, you are so different—so much nicer—than other actors!"

Hot air, you will opine, and nothing but the reflection of the open hearth aglow in my own eyes! And perhaps you are right, but it was enough to warm me then as I stood there, a dripping cupid without a quiver.

I was shivering, but happy, when the taxi came coughing up to the door.

"You must let me give you a lift," said Jeanne as she sprinted into the cab, and I was about to accept her kind and polite invitation when I heard the clarion voice of Leffingwell behind me.

"Tarry a little!" he called. Banging the door behind him, the star, accompanied by his manager, dived past me into the cab.

"You won't mind dropping us down at my apartments, will you, Jeanne, my dear?" asked Leffingwell.

"Not at all," she replied amiably, and then turning to me—I was standing in the rain—added, "Pile in, Mr. Barretsford!"

My foot was on the step, when Pierpont thrust out a restraining hand. "Old man," he expostulated, "you'll get us all wet. You'd better ride outside with the chuffer!"

"That seems a shame!" pattered Jeanne.

"So it is!" sympathized Leffingwell.

"But he's so sloppy now, it won't matter if he gets sloppier, will it, Mr. Barretsford?" This from Pierpont.

"I don't know," I countered peevishly; "I wasn't born in an aquarium."

With that thrust, I snapped the door shut and crawled into a seat beside the chauffeur, who beneficently tendered me a corner of his rubber rug to wrap around my legs.

All the long way to Leffingwell's rookery I reconstructed the episode of the taxicab as it should have been. In that reconstruction I wasn't even damp, and I was alone in the car with Jeanne, alone with vast possibilities. We might even have progressed so far as calling each other by our front names! Love and lumbago—it was the limit!

At last we swirled up to that germ factory over which Leffingwell lived, and he and Gus spilled themselves out of the taxi with a cheery "good night."

"You'd better come inside—I don't mind," advised Jeanne through the speaking tube, but I resolutely declined, determined that I should at least have the satisfaction of being a martyr and giving her a chance to accumulate remorse as we drove to that far corner of the city where the pollywogs play in the puddles and the goats grub on the green.

At that humble habitation where Jeanne dwelt, I unlimbered my length and opened the cab door.

"Here's my latch-key," she babbled. "Will you please open the front door so that I can dash in without getting wet."

I wrestled with the lock while the rain irrigated my back—the one spot which had warmed up during my exile on the box-seat. Finally, when I had got the hang of it, Jeanne flew across the pavement and asked me to step within for a moment.

"You're a perfect dear!" she breathed.

Laying a hand on my arm, and without the slightest encouragement on my part, she suddenly kissed me. You can mark the spot with a cross, if you like, by measuring an inch and a half up-stage from the point of your chin and about three-quarters of an inch down-stage from the base of your nose. I was so surprised, electrified and petrified that I could only gulp.

"There!" she murmured. "Go—hurry home—before you catch cold!" She propelled me out of the vestibule and shut the door upon me before I could muster even a mutter.

"Where to?" solicited the chauffeur.

His voice called me down from the celestial court where the fountains ran champagne; but, still edged with ether, I prattled, "Drive me round the lobe of Elysium, skirt the vale of Valhalla and leave me in the lobby of Olympus!"

"Ah, them joy palaces is all shut up be this time," he reproved. "The only joints open that I know of is the police stations, Chinatown and Childs's beaneries!"

"Shades of Jehu!" I mourned, simmering

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down to the realities of rain and the confines of cosmos. "Take me to that hapless hostelry, Maggie Muldoon, hostess, three doors from the bowling alley on the corner of Thirteenth Street and Maple Court."

"Seven dollars and forty-five cents!" presumed the chauffeur, when I stumbled out of the cab in front of my residence.

"Six dollars and thirty-seven cents!" I corrected him, emptying my pockets.

He accepted that sum on account and took out the balance in polishing up Mrs. Muldoon's stoop with my corporeal carcass, while my sub-nebular mind contemplated the signs of the zodiac and my astral ears listed to the music of the spheres.

CHAPTER IV

JEANNE OF THE APPETITE

IN THE course of my morning toilette, I was amazed and gratified to discover that I had sustained no mortal or visible hurts, except where they wouldn't show.

The remembrance of Jeanne's impetuous and rapturous farewell in the cloistered vestibule soothed those sequestered hurts, and sent me valiantly forth in fresh habiliments to strike off the shackles of clerkship.

"What's the matter with you? Don't you like your job?" asked J. M., the junior member of the firm, when I broke the news to him.

"I'm going to be an actor!" I replied, just as though I had said, "I'm going to be an angel—Mr. Rockefeller has arranged it."

"An actor! So that's it! Well, I'm——!" He looked me over, the same way he might a counterfeit quarter, and, swinging his head toward the private office, called in the voice of a discoverer, "Barney! Here's Smink, goin' to be an actor!"

Old B. F. ambled out, picked his glasses off his ear and balanced them on the end of his nose. "Smink, goin' to be an actor?" he wondered. "Well, well, well!"

"And when do you begin bein' an actor?" queried J. M., shifting his quid.

"The Leffingwell Associated Players, of which company I am a leading member, opens next Saturday night in 'Golden Gulch'——"

"Never heard of the place," dropped in B. F.

"That's the name of the play, not the place," I explained. "Our first stand is Angora."

"'Pon me word, I'd like to see ye perform, Smink!" declared J. M. enthusiastically.

"No doubt you'll have that privilege next season, when I go out in Shakespeare. I shall be playing all the big cities."

"Do ye hear that?" chirped B. F. to his brother. "I always said Smink might be good for *somethin'*."

In order that they might know who was who on the stage, I told them that I had changed my name to Barretsford. This, they amiably agreed, was a fine alias, and saying that surely they would some day point with pride to the fact that I had once held down a stool in their office, they gave me their blessing and added that if at any time between seasons I had a spare moment they would be glad to have me drop in upon them.

Thus freed from the ties that grind, I blithely drew the required deposit of one hundred dollars from bank and placed it in the hand of Pierpont at the next rehearsal.

That was an expensive week for me, that week of rehearsals. It cost me twenty-five to learn the art of make-up. Walgrime, who taught me, usually charged a great deal more, but it seems he had taken a fancy to me and wanted to see me make a hit in the part. Then Browleigh let me have a wig of his, which cost him thirty dollars, for fifteen. It was all the better for having been used for a couple of seasons, he explained—it gave it character. My make-up box was also a bargain. Treffer had once played character parts and had just the outfit I needed. I got the whole thing, including a big bunch of crêpe hair with which to make whiskers, for twelve dollars. It would have cost me twice that much anywhere else.

When Pierpont heard of this deal he said he was sorry I hadn't let him know. He had a box he would have given me for less, but to even up on that count he leased me—he wouldn't sell them—a frock coat and a high silk hat to wear in the last act for ten dollars the season.

I was thinking of buying an old suit of clothes for the Gulch scenes and a trunk from the property man, but Leffingwell said that it was bad luck to take a camel-back trunk on the road and that I had better let him furnish me withal. That

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cost me thirty-five dollars, but even at that I could see I was saving money.

I hoped, however, that my preliminary expenses would end there, but it appeared that whenever the management agrees to put your name on the posters—and of course I didn't want to be left out—the actors are required to pay a certain percentage of the first cost of printing. After that there is no charge, which I thought rather liberal. My percentage was an even $77.54.

Eugenie Sinclair was the only member of the company who took no interest in saving money for me. She must have had a soul above salvage. By this remark I mean to cast no asperity upon Jeanne de Angelus. It is true that she never tried to save money for me, but she was expensive in other ways.

I loved her and she had an appetite. Every night after rehearsal it was my habit to take her home, and on the way to a car—no more taxicabs for me—we used to pass a refined but mercenary little café. Jeanne would begin by talking about the way her system was crying out for just a spoonful of ice cream, and end up by ordering what she called a light supper, consisting of broiled lobster, asparagus tips on toast, mushrooms under glass, a *café parfait* and a pot of chocolate; or chicken salad, sweetbreads and peas, and lemon custard pie, while I ordered a glass of milk and tried to keep my mind off of arithmetic by sopping up the honey of her patter.

I was no mere commuter on the primrose path, I'd have you know. I was the champion, long-distance, vestibuled, eighteen-hour flyer with an *à la carte* service and a pig-skin library, and I placed no gastronometer on the leading lady's meals. If the way to that blonde's heart was double-tracked through her tummy, then I was going to be president of the line and maintain a regular *batterie de cuisine* regardless of the anti-bust laws and the high cost of giving.

But, as the syndicate that underwrote these operations in manna, I was gradually being reduced to a financial condition calling for the appointment of a receiver. All that I could reckon in the way of assets was a bank-balance of less than a hundred dollars and six or seven osculatory deposits, usually made by Jeanne out of the gratefulness of her well-filled food vault, as I bade her good-night on the doormat.

She had a disconcerting, sweetly matter-of-fact way in the exchange of these salutations that dismissed me directly I was on the point of asking her for some oral expression of her affection; but I was nevertheless content with the progress I had made and willing to wait, watch and listen until the moment came which should challenge our mutual confession—swift, sudden, symbolic, like the silent splash of a shooting star.

CHAPTER V

PIERPONT IS BRIBED

WITH the great question thus in a state of suspended animation, and the scrapings of my bank-account—about eighty dollars—in my pocket, I started out on the road with the Leffingwell Associated Players early one Saturday morning. I remember how important I felt as I joined the company, assembling in the railroad station, swinging my newly acquired cane and throwing open my coat that the populace might gladden their eyes with the sight of my resplendent vest.

Apparently unconscious of the attention I attracted, I spoke kindly to my fellow-players, as befits the attitude of the great to the less, and smiled my approval as the leading lady bore down upon us—crisp, comely and cologned.

Pierpont, who had been fidgeting about, fearful lest Jeanne should be late, waved his strip of transportation in the air, shooed us past the ticket-examiner, and with unnecessary fluster herded us aboard the train.

I took possession of Jeanne, found her a seat and bestowed myself beside her. It was a great moment! There I was, actually embarked upon my stage career, with the leading lady at my side.

My mood was fit for mighty declarations then, and there in the rocking train I might have told her of my matrimonial and ambitious expectations, had not Pierpont suddenly swung himself on the arm of our seat to unfold one of his brilliant advertising schemes, in which it was his purpose that I should play a part.

Said he, "I've got it all framed up, and the town of Angora is sitting on its doorstep waiting to give us the merry mitt!"

"What is it?" asked Jeanne, who took a strange interest in mundane things.

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"A game of ball! The Leffingwell Associated Players versus the Angora Gnats! Great, isn't it?"

"Immense!" cheered Jeanne. "What's Mr. Barretsford going to play?"

"Do you expect me to play?" I asked, cross at being interrupted, and indignant at the notion of being used as an advertising medium anyway.

Pierpont smiled enigmatically.

"I never heard of anything so undignified," I went on, very much aloft. "I'm an actor, not a ball-player!"

"Now don't get so far up-stage about it," drawled the manager. "We never thought of putting you on the nine. You may be a good actor, but you don't look as if you could play marbles, let alone ball!"

His imputation irritated me. "I'll bet I can play a better game of ball than you!" I barked.

"Run away in a corner and twitter, youth!" derided Pierpont. "I wouldn't bet with you—it would be like robbing a crib!"

I was about to make some epigrammatic retort, when Jeanne subdued me with a touch of her hand and asked, "Did you ever play base-ball, Rudolph?"

"Did I?" I snorted. "I used to be captain and pitcher of my school team, and——"

"Amat-chewer!" jeered Pierpont. "This is real, genuine, professional ball we're goin' to play. Any one of us could make his living at the same if he put his mind to it. The only trouble with our team is that we're out of practise and got too many pitchers."

"I wouldn't mind pitching a few innings, myself," I murmured. "Not that I want to play, but just to show you a thing or two!"

Pierpont oscillated his fat head. "Sorry, old man, but we couldn't run the risk—not in this game. Might try you out later on some dog-town team. But I'll tell you what you could do: you could help Jeanne keep score!"

"If I can't pitch," I began hotly, "I'll——"

"Well you can't," cut in the manager decisively. "I'm goin' to occupy the box!"

"Who's running this game?" I demanded.

"Leffingwell's captain of the team!"

I ROSE abruptly and stalked down the aisle to where our star sat wrapped in solemn colloquy with the landscape. I'd see whether or no I was to be shoved into the wings by a mere comedian-manager! Leffingwell, I must say, was a sympathetic soul. He listened to my complaint like a father and, when I had finished, tried to curry my ruffled sensibilities.

"I'll see what can be done for you, my boy!" he said.

But I was impatient to get the best of Pierpont. "Won't you let me pitch?" I entreated.

Leffingwell raised his eyebrows dubiously. "Pitch? Well, hardly. You see I have already assigned that part to Gus, and I—I've no excuse for taking it from him. I think I'd better put you in right field."

"Let Gus play right field," I countered; "and give me the ball."

"It couldn't be done—unless—unless!" He paused, pondering, and then dismissed the idea, whatever it was, with a dramatic toss of his head. "No—no!"

"What were you thinking of?" I quizzed eagerly, ready for anything that might unseat the arrogant Gus and set me up in his place.

Leffingwell looked out the window. "It wouldn't do, but I was thinking—well, between you and me, Gus is mercenary. That's the only flaw in his character. I was thinking of a ruse; but I doubt if it would succeed. In fact, I don't think it would."

On edge, I asked, "What—what is it?"

The tragedian studied the rack above his head before replying:

"It wouldn't do to let the other members of the company know anything about it because they might imagine I was showing you favoritism. I was thinking we might *bribe* Gus to let you pitch."

"Bribe him?" I echoed.

"Yes! As I said, he's mercenary, but even then I fear he wouldn't surrender the ball to you in this game—he's rather proud of his pitching—not even for ten dollars. Still, we'll try it if you say so."

"Suppose," I suggested, hedging a little, "we were to offer him a five-dollar bill—eh?"

"It wouldn't be convincing. We really ought to offer him a good deal more. I doubt if ten will tempt him. I think we'd better forget about it. Make the best of it, Rudolph. Play right field."

I took out my pocketbook, selected the dirtiest ten-spot in that lean bunch of eighty, and pressed it on Leffingwell.

"You carry on the negotiations!" I so-

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licited. He tried to put me off, but I was so insistent that he finally yielded.

"It would be a good idea," mused Leffingwell, caressing the bill and placing it tenderly in his vest pocket, "if we didn't let Gus know that this came from you. Then if he gets angry—well, he can vent it upon me!"

"That's very generous of you!"

Leffingwell smiled one of his sweetly melancholy smiles.

"My boy," he breathed deeply, picking a thread off my coat-sleeve and rolling it into a tiny ball between his fingers, "I think we understand each other!"

"Well," snickered Pierpont, as he made way for me beside Jeanne; "did you fix it up with the star?"

I felt like kicking him, but I dissembled as follows:

"No, not exactly 'fixed' it, but he's promised to see what can be done."

"He ought to let you pitch," championed Jeanne.

I winked at her knowingly and diplomatically shrugged my shoulders, while the manager grinned and went huffing down the aisle. When he was out of earshot, I confided to the leading lady that I had reason to believe that she would see me in the pitcher's box that afternoon.

"Yes," she beamed, "I know you have a pull with the star."

"It isn't that—it's just that we understand each other!"

"And you're so persuasive!"

Her hand was on the seat between us. I slipped mine over it and there it stayed while the mileposts clicked by with military precision as though hurrying to overtake one another on their rush back toward the city. So we rode in momentous silence, until the shriek of the engine whistle and the ambiguous cry of the brakeman brought Pierpont back with the news that we were descending upon Angora.

THE first thing that challenged my attention, as I handed Jeanne down to the station platform, was a rickety board fence which had been transformed into a gorgeous panorama of hairbreadth escapes and dire damages by fire and flood, framed ever and anon with flamboyant lettering, advising an ignorant public that Leffingwell's Associated Players, a superb and splendid all-star cast of metropolitan favorites, fresh from a triumphant 300-nights' run in New York, would present that stirring drama of the Far West, entitled "Golden Gulch"—thrills and heart-throbs—at the Angora Opera-House on Saturday night, April 21.

True to promise and payment, there glowed and glistened the name, "Rudolph Barretsford," in purple print on the scroll that bore the brave roster of our band. True it was only among those present, below the scarehead of Leffingwell, but for me it spoke in Bellona's voice, setting every nerve atingle.

Reluctantly turning from that blazing evidence of my histrionic greatness, I trailed across the tracks after the rest of the troupe to the Red Hessian Inn. There we all registered with a crescendo of flourishes, and I found myself assigned to a pitcher and basin in company with Walgrime, whom I longed to bathe in a solution of chloride of lime.

While I proceeded to set him a good example by performing such aquatics as the basin would permit, Walgrime stood at the open window, sniffing the air.

"I smell grub," said he, "and I hereby appoint myself a committee of one to rouse the landlord of this venerable joint and bid him set forth the baked meats!"

So saying, he borrowed a cigar of me and departed.

He had scarcely gone, when Leffingwell peeped in at the door.

"Alone? Good!" He entered and flung himself on the bed. "I bring you glad tidings, my boy. After many excursions and alarums, most wearing to a man of sentiment, I have succeeded in placating Gus. You may pitch!"

"He was hard to convince?" I asked, polishing my face.

Leffingwell sighed. "Let me not think on it! Suffice it to say that I was obliged to raise the bribe to fifteen! I took that responsibility myself, and if you do not feel that I acted wisely, let the loss be mine—say no more about the five dollars I invested in your behalf."

You don't often meet a philanthropic person like Leffingwell! I couldn't think of taking advantage of his generosity. He protested. I insisted. Another five dollars passed from my pocket into his. Our sordid business thus happily despatched, we obeyed the glad summons to luncheon,

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an ample and delicious meal, served to the company at a long table and growled over only by Pierpont, who reported that the advance sale of tickets for our show indicated a suspicious and skeptical neighborhood.

"It looks to me like a jay town," he commented, biting savagely into an ear of corn.

"No, I think not," opined the optimistic Leffingwell. "It looked like rain this morning. The inhabitants have merely deferred their bookings until assured of a salubrious evening."

"The ball game will be a splendid advertisement," chirped up Jeanne, who until this moment had been too busy to join in the conversation.

"Without a doubt," agreed the star; "and, by the way, I want to caution the members of the company that we must on no account defeat the home team in to-day's tournament."

Superfluous direction! The Angora Gnats, grim and greedy, ran up a score of twenty-three to nothing against Leffingwell's trustless troubadours, while a hilarious crowd of natives, augmented by the gentry from the villas thereabouts, guyed us on to inglorious but game defeat.

Far from being downcast by our Waterloo, Leffingwell was in high spirits.

"You must think of the residuum," he remarked as he left off telling me that my pitching was as marvelous as "Lefty" Russell's. "This vast concourse of people, now departing happily from the field, will no doubt come to see us on our native heath to-night. The night promises to be fair, and we have but sharpened their appetites for stronger meat."

Turning from me, he gave debonair greeting to the captain of the Angora Gnats, shook hands with the players as they gathered grinningly about him, showered compliments upon them all, and closed a Shakesperian peroration on the brotherhood of man by extending to the team the courtesies of a box for the night's performance.

CHAPTER VI

THE OPENING PERFORMANCE

AS I was struggling with my make-up on our opening night, Jeanne, with that impersonal disregard for meagerness of attire so characteristic of a player, pirouetted into my neat little dressing room and borrowed my hare's-foot. That nymph in lingerie coolly rouged her cheeks before my glass.

"I really believe we're going to have an audience!" she remarked. "I just heard a crowd coming in!"

"Rats!" deprecated Walgrime from across the hall. "That's the ball team!"

"The advance guard of the multitude!" vaunted Leffingwell through the partition.

With a final flirt of the hare's-foot, Jeanne twirled out the door.

"I'm going to see for myself!" she carolled, and I heard her dainty slippered feet dancing up the stairs to the stage.

Stirred by indescribable emotions, I tried to put my mind on my part as I limned my face, but my thoughts were all whirling about the leading lady; and the next thing I remember was hearing the voice of Browleigh, in the rôle of stage-manager, calling out, "Overture!"

At the first note, sounded by that bucolic orchestra—piano, fiddle, and horn—playing "The Heart Bowed Down," a lump rose in my esophagus and my hand shook as I pulled the *Deacon's* wig over my head; my throat became as dry as parchment and chills played tag up and down my spine.

"First act!" bawled Browleigh while I was still tugging at the straps of a mildewed pair of boots.

I heard the clatter of hurrying footsteps in the hall, then silence, then my name shouted, and snatching at a battered sombrero, I stumbled up the stairs and collided with Jeanne, an impossible but lovely cowgirl in a white blouse, short buckskin skirt and patent-leather boots.

"Where's the *Deacon?*" she asked breathlessly.

"I'm the *Deacon!*" I quivered.

"Good heavens! I didn't know you!" she laughed and, giving me a look of approval, shoved me into the wings.

"Here, you!" stormed Browleigh, grabbing me by the arm and throwing me on a soapbox up-stage near what I took to be the bar of the Eagle's Nest Hotel. "Don't you know you open the play!"

In the dim light I could see Clutters leaning over the bar and Walgrime shuffling a pack of cards at a table down-stage. Yes, I saw them, but only as one sees shapes through a fog. The next instant I was blinded by a vast light that seemed to rock

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as it enveloped me. The curtain was rising, and from afar off, it seemed to me, came an inconsequential patter of applause.

My mind was without a tenant; every idea fled in a panic at that flash of the footlights; I sat there blinking stoically. Familiar lines came to my ears in desperate repetitions from the prompter, but stirred no echo in my brain. Clutters left his station behind the bar and with ready improvisation offered me a drink, at the same time thrusting a bunch of words at me. Automatically I repeated them in a voice I did not recognize as my own and, as Walgrime replied from his seat at the table, I suddenly saw the typewritten page of my part as clearly as though I had held the script in my hands. I began reading from it.

By the time that Leffingwell made his entrance, Barretsford was himself again, the late occupants of my attic returned in good order, and complete paralysis was succeeded by acute animation.

In the great scene where the *Deacon* sees the vision of *Nugget Nora's* dead mother, my genius, which had been long submerged, came up spouting! The audience—what there was of it—vouchsafed me an enormous round of applause. After that I simply ate up the part and, not to be ignored in the thrilling and hilarious finish of the act, wherein *Bounding Bud* gets the drop on *Whitechapel Jerry*, I improvised a piece of business, a cry and a fall, that gave just the right touch of pathos to the curtain.

I didn't need to be told then by a clamorous assembly beyond the footlights, or the great Leffingwell and the lovely Jeanne behind them, that I was a great actor. I knew it! And I took the curtain calls with the rest of the company after the manner of a bored but indulgent star.

It was then that I noted for the first time the phalanx of empty seats. Outside of the Angora Gnats, who filled the boxes, there must have been at least a dozen people in the house; but, as Leffingwell said, it was a most enthusiastic and discriminating audience, and he had rather play before a handful of intelligent people than a houseful of mere groundlings.

I was constrained to agree with him. Deficient in numbers, our Angora audience nevertheless knew no stint when it came to enthusiasm. When the *Deacon*, restored to his senses in the last act, denounced the villain, they fairly cheered. It was a triumph! Leffingwell himself told me that in all his experience he had never seen such a remarkable performance.

"Gad, my boy, you were tremendous!" said he, coming into my dressing-room and giving me a hearty slap on the back.

"You gave a fine performance, yourself," I advised him, modestly ignoring his praise.

"Fair, only fair," he contended. "My mind was not at ease. I was a little worried about some financial matters."

I WAS on the point of asking him what the night's receipts were when Pierpont broke in upon us. "Say, Julius," he began in a tone of disgust, "would you mind measuring me for a hearse?"

"What's the trouble, Gus?"

The manager sank limply on my trunk.

"Oh, I'm all in," he despaired; "but I leave you to cart away the remains, if there are any after the owner of this mausoleum and the bandit who keeps that food-factory across the road get through picking my bones. We played to just $7.25 to-night; we owe $25 for the rent of this sepulcher; $30 for stabling the troupe; $10 for decorating the surrounding cemetery with the finest exhibition of lithographs in three colors ever put up north of the watermelon belt; and we need about $17 to float us on to that famous center of culture known as Culpepper Corners. A grand, gigantic and ghoulish total of $82. In the way of liquid assets I may mention the $7.25 aforesaid opulent box-office receipts, the sum of $12, and some sixty cents which I wrested from the fell clutch of circumstance. Moreover, it is rumored in financial circles that you are the depository of government funds to the extent of $5!"

"Four!" corrected Leffingwell severely.

"It may be estimated then, without the aid of expert accountants," went on Pierpont, waving the stub of a pencil and striking a balance on the lid of my trunk, "that we are officially about $50 shy, and no mother at home to help us! Neither do I see, after examining the blue vault above, any signs of an angelic dispensation of unearned dividends. Hence my chatter of hearses and interment!"

"Why not pay your debts by check?" I suggested.

"Not on your life!" exclaimed Pierpont

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in a panic. "I'd be sure to be caught, and it's a penal offense!"

I stared at him bewildered; then questioned Leffingwell with a look.

"You don't comprehend the situtaion, my boy," he explained. "Ever since the failure of the Immunity Trust & Safe Deposit Company, neither Gus nor I have had faith sufficient in monetary institutions to open bank-accounts."

"Oh," I gasped. "I supposed of course that you both had bank-accounts."

"When a big trust company like that gets on the blink, it's plain to see, isn't it, why the most confiding infidel 'ud lose his faith in 'em?" drooled the manager, taking a big blond cigar from his pocket and chewing off the end of it.

I could understand that, but I could not understand why they should venture out on the road without capital, and told them so.

Pierpont rolled his cigar from the left to the right corner of his mouth and contemplated it with crossed eyes for an instant. "You tell him how it is, Julius!"

The star ran his fingers through his long hair and began: "When Gus maltreated his wife last Winter——"

"Cut that out!" objected Pierpont.

"Am I unfolding this unvarnished tale, or you?" flared Leffingwell.

"You, you scandal-monger," coughed Gus, "but you don't need to go into such personal details!"

"Well, I won't repeat what the court said, but the verdict was alimony, $100 per. Neither shall I touch upon the merits of the case, nor impugn the honesty of that high tribunal. Still, the amount was excessive, and I am willing to concede that there was some excuse for Gus evading payment and sequestering his funds in a safe-deposit vault. To abbreviate the tale, detectives in the employ of Mrs. Pierpont located the cache only two weeks ago, just as we had organized our tour, and attached the last penny. In this extremity I was obliged to empty my own exchequer; and what with payments of advance royalties on our play, the cost of those handsome lithographs which you saw adorning this bleak hamlet, the expenses of booking the tour, the rent of the hall for rehearsals and a thousand and one demands upon me incidental to the launching of this enterprise, I found myself with barely enough remaining to transport us to our first stand."

"There! You see how it is!" Pierpont mopped a perspiring brow and appealed to me for sympathy. "What are we going to do?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," I replied stoically, thinking of the sixty dollars remaining in my pocketbook.

Leffingwell borrowed my box of cold cream and began to remove his make-up. "If we could but contrive to reach Culpepper Corners," he deliberated, "our dilemma would dissolve itself through its own alchemy."

"Well, rather!" cheered up Gus. "Those Culpepper citizens are spenders! Why I remember playing there last season to capacity and with a show that sized up to ours like a match to a calcium. It's a melon! We'd have the bailiffs of that burg giving us banquets!"

THERE was silence for a moment. Thinking again of the money in my pocket, I felt like a traitor to a noble cause. I was on the verge of compromising with myself, considering lending them $25 if they could raise the balance needed elsewhere, when Leffingwell spoke up.

"Perhaps we might make a sacrifice and let the owner of this theater have a quarter interest in our organization for $500!"

"What?" stormed Pierpont. "Us give that milk-fed spaniel a quarter interest in the Leffingwell Associated Players for $500? Why, man alive, I wouldn't let him have a sniff at it for $5,000! Think what we cleared last season with 'A Maiden's Peril!'"

"How much did you clear?" I inquired.

"You tell him, Julius!"

"In the neighborhood of $17,000, I think it was," supplied his partner readily. "But why think of that—it's gone and we are confronted with the urgent present."

My clerical mind set actively to work figuring on possible profits to a humble investor.

"How much money have you put into this enterprise so far, Mr. Leffingwell?" I asked.

"Offhand—without consulting the books—I should say about $4,000!"

"More like $5,000!" prompted Gus.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," I ventured. "I'll give you $50 for a quarter interest."

Pierpont was plainly insulted; but Leffingwell merely looked injured.

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"Put that proposition on a slab and have it massaged," jeered the manager. "You've got Russell Sage ideas and a piker's instinct."

"No!" reproved the star, "Mr. Barretsford simply knows that we are temporarily embarrassed and, like all men reared in a commercial atmosphere, he feels he is justified in taking advantage of us. I don't blame him, and in order to satisfy him and close the matter amicably, I will give him a quarter interest in my share, that's an eighth interest in the whole, for $50."

Pierpont slipped off the trunk and shook himself. It was his way of saying that he washed his hands of the entire transaction. Somewhat nettled, I stopped him as he made for the door.

"I don't want you to think that I am taking advantage of your difficulties," I told him, "and just to show you that I'm no tight-wad, I'll give you $50 for a one-tenth interest!"

I think that was pretty smart of me, seeing that Leffingwell had put $5,000 into the business.

"Nothing could be more upright and whole-hearted," declared the star. "I knew that Rudolph didn't mean to take advantage of us. Come, Gus, I think you should agree to his proposal."

Gus agreed, but he remarked as he took my $50 that I was doing very well by myself and that it wasn't often a young man got such a chance to invest his money.

"'There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune,'" quoted Leffingwell. "Your hands, partners!" Royally he offered his left to Gus, his right to me. "'All for one—one for all!'"

HALF an hour later Jeanne and I, having set the host of our inn to foraging, were discussing cheese sandwiches and beer and telling each other what good actors we were.

"This is a nice place!" she munched.

"I'll come back here and buy it for you at the close of the season," I rejoined expansively.

"You're a great josher, aren't you, Rudolph?"

"No! I mean it! I'll have a bunch of money coming to me then. I like the place myself."

"Then let's stay over to-morrow," she suggested. "The company's going to Culpepper Corners on the ten o'clock train. We don't need to go with them. We could wait until after supper. There's a train leaving at eight that gets into the Corners at about eleven. I looked up the time-table. I'll make Gus give us our tickets separately."

"Jeanne," I murmured, taking her free hand across the table, "we'll idle the golden hours away together here. It will be like——"

"Like a picnic!" she inserted. "Only we'll eat our meals at the inn!"

"You ought to keep a restaurant!" I advised, a little put out at her interruption when I was thinking in blank verse.

It was our first quarrel, and I was just patching it up with allusions to what I called her birdlike appetite, when the voice of the landlord called to us a warning that he was about to lock up for the night.

"Coming!" I returned peevishly, and mutely begged Jeanne's forgiveness.

"You've hurt me dreadfully, but—there!"

A blessing on quarrels, say I, that end with such noiseless emphasis!

CHAPTER VII

AN IMPROMPTU TORCH

SUNDAY morning I was up and out before Morpheus had relieved Walgrime of a Bacchanalian bundle, with which he had made the night hideous. Descending to breakfast, I announced to Leffingwell and Pierpont that I would leave the company if they ever herded me with Walgrime again.

"Why, what's gnawing your victuals?" asked Gus.

I drew a violent picture of the heavy man submerged in the Circean cup.

Star and manager apologized. They didn't know that Walgrime was addicted to wassail in carload lots. I should have Treffer for a roommate hereafter. Treffer was not only gentlemanly, he was refined—always kicked when he didn't get a room with a bath. He would ameliorate the monotony of the idle hours with polite apostrophes to the shade of Beau Brummel and erudite speculations on the best way to dress for a pink tea.

"I'll take a chance on Treffer at the next stand," I said.

"You'll find yourself in commodious

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quarters at Culpepper Corners," intoned Leffingwell. "Gus has arranged to quarter the company on the estate of Squire Peevie; a large, roomy, regular Colonial mansion affair, lawns and all sorts of gardens, you know!"

"We'll be more like guests there than boarders!" supplemented Pierpont.

"What about paying for my board here?" I asked.

Leffingwell dismissed the question with one of his ornate gestures. "We liquidate your hotel bills and deduct the same from your salary at the end of each week, unless you prefer to select your own hostelry and lose the advantage of such special rates as we can obtain."

As this was the first proposition made to me involving no immediate payment on my part, I expressed myself as entirely satisfied with the arrangement and, telling them that Jeanne and I proposed waiting over in Angora for the evening train, I asked for and obtained our transportation to the next stand.

By this time the rest of the company, with the exception of Jeanne and Walgrime, had straggled into the dining-room. Leaving my theatrical partners to galvanize the heavy man for extradition to Culpepper Corners, I strolled alone into the country, as the leading lady was having her breakfast in bed.

True to her appetite, Jeanne appeared at luncheon and made her peace with me by saying that she had had a headache.

"I'm all right now," she purred, polishing off her third plate of strawberries. "What I needed was food. Did you ever eat such food? We'll never strike another place like this on our tour! I'm glad we stayed over."

She was still harping on the forage as we footed it down the road in the afternoon sun and turned into a little wood. I wanted to talk to her seriously of higher things, but she didn't respond when I told her at some length just what sort of a person I was, how I felt about the influence of a woman in a man's life, and opened up to her a field of mutual speculation on the strange phenomena of affinities.

We were seated at the edge of the wood on the roots of a big hickory, commanding a view of a meadow where a herd of Alderneys were grazing. "It isn't half bad being a cow," she interrupted me, just as I was swarming up the hill of my thesis with the muffler off.

I hid my annoyance behind a patronizing grin and wondered what sort of stuff her brains were made of.

"What's your thought, little one?"

"Cows have nothing to do but eat, or chew the cud all day long," she murmured dreamily. Stretching out her arm with indolent grace—an arm bare to the elbow, creamy-white and exquisitely modeled—she pointed to a solemn-faced bovine whose calf was frisking about her. "See that one! She doesn't even have to bother with her calf! It's feeding itself already!"

"Animals," I instructed her, "have no responsibilities worth mentioning. That cow, for instance, knows very well that if she doesn't look after her calf, the farmer will."

"That's just it," she sighed. "And how nice it makes it for the cow!"

Jeanne spoke so wistfully that I turned from my contemplation of the scene to look at her. There was a little furrow between her eyes and a little droop at the corners of her mouth that I had never seen before. Feeling that there was something more than cows in her thoughts, I asked in gentle solicitude,

"What is it, Jeanne?"

She put out her dainty, warm, but firm hand to me, and with an odd, quivering smile—a smile that struck at my heart—said,

"If you speak to me like that I shall cry!"

What hidden chord had I struck in blindness? And why should the sight of a soporific cow have attuned that chord to my blundering touch? Within myself I found no answer to these questions, and instinct, not shyness, forbade me probe the bosom of that sad-eyed little sphinx.

Subconsciously I sensed, what I was to learn long afterward, that Jeanne wasn't just appetite and blond prettiness but a quixotically noble creature, half-fool, half-saint, whose dappled cloak hid her once resplendent but now bedraggled wings.

With these thoughts unformed, yet tangible enough to color my mood, her hand in mine, our faces turned toward the abysmal west, we sat there in profound but not unhappy silence, watching the sun go down behind a row of poplars which stood, like slender sentinels, upon a far-away hill.

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At length Jeanne looked at me brightly and gave my hand an affectionate pat.

"We've had such a nice afternoon. Let's go or we'll be late for supper."

JEANNE became her kittenish self again that night. When we finally settled ourselves in the train she cuddled up close to me and fell asleep against my shoulder like a child. She was so confiding, so femininely warm, and her hair was so sweet-smelling, that I would have been more than content if I could only have forgotten that I had had to pay her extra day's board as well as mine at the Red Hessian; and it was borne in upon me at the same time that I, Rudolph Smink alias Barretsford, who, three weeks before reckoned his worldly pelf at $500, was now reduced to a lonely $5 bill. Then and there I convened in secret caucus, and it was resolved that said bill should be worn next to my skin like an amulet.

Somewhere in the vicinity of midnight, Jeanne and I alighted alone at Culpepper Corners and found that town all dogs and darkness. The dogs discouraged the inquiries we otherwise would have made as to the location of Squire Peevie's, and the darkness defeated our efforts to find the way ourselves. I doubt that we should have reached our destination until morning had it not been for a freak of Fate which delivered us with one hand and plunged us into greater difficulties with the other.

After a half-hour's distressful exploration we arrived at what I took to be the town square, and were debating whither to turn, when the carbon of the night was suddenly perforated by a spark, then burst asunder by a flame, which ripped through the shutters of a big two-story building just across the way.

"Serves 'em right!" I exclaimed. "Now we'll be able to see where we're going!"

"I love a fire!" cried Jeanne. "Let's stay and see what happens."

"You'll see the whole town burn down if we don't give the alarm!"

Instructing her to make herself comfortable on a watering-trough, I ran down the nearest street yelling "Fire!" and kicking dogs, and in about five minutes the courthouse bell was clanging and the square was full of gaping natives.

The Leffingwell Associated Players arrived in debonair disorder, and last of all the Culpepper Corners Volunteer Fire Brigade. They stuck a garden hose into the town pump and made a great show of sprinkling the grass in front of the burning building. This was too much for Leffingwell. Dressed in a suit of tattered pink pajamas and a silk hat, he organized a bucket brigade.

"Get in line there, Rudolph!" he shouted in my ear.

"Oh, thunder," I expostulated. "Let them fight their own fire!"

"*Their* fire?" he stormed. "It's *ours!* We're booked to play in that burning edifice!"

CHAPTER VIII

HOME-MADE "AS YOU LIKE IT"

UNDER the whitewashed shade of Squire Peevie's shack, Colonial in age, perhaps, but not in architecture, the Leffingwell Associated Players disconsolately sniffed the sickly breeze redolent of swine and boiled cabbage, and intermittently discussed the passing of Culpepper Town Hall, which had burned to its cellars in spite of our Homeric efforts to avert the catastrophe.

The noonday sun hung overhead, relieving Pierpont of his shadow only as he plodded, panting and perspiring, across the road and turned in through the sagging gate to the retreat where we awaited the result of his visit to the Corners.

Before he had set forth that morning, Pierpont, with Leffingwell strutting at his heels, had got me into a corner and offered me an additional tenth interest in the show for another fifty dollars. I told them that I appreciated their offer, that I would jump at it in fact, but the truth was my funds were exhausted.

"Well, then, couldn't you give us a check?" asked Gus. "I think I could get it cashed."

"You don't understand," I resumed. "I am stone broke, busted, bankrupt. I only had five hundred dollars to begin with and I have withdrawn the last cent!"

"Is—is that absolutely the—the case?" stammered Leffingwell, as pale as tapioca.

"It is!"

Pierpont gasped. "And we thought——"

"It's most unfortunate," interrupted the star faintly.

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"It's diabolical!" added the manager.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," I said. "Are you short?"

"Short?" echoed Pierpont. "We're stripped!"

"If we could only find some place to give our performance, I am confident that we'd play to phenomenal business in this town," encouraged Leffingwell, his optimistic soul rebounding.

"We might," agreed Gus gloomily.

"Suppose you try. You know you are very adroit in leading a forlorn hope, Gus."

Leffingwell smiled inspiringly at his partner.

"I suppose it *is* up to me to hustle some!"

And without further comment Pierpont pulled his derby over his eyes and faced the road to Culpepper Corners

When at last he came shuffling back through the gate his air of melancholy told us that he had failed in his quest.

"It's no use," he grunted, as he dropped down on a soapbox and mopped his face. "This is a —— of a town! There ain't even a barn fit to give a Punch and Judy show in —nothing but the Methodist Church!"

"Have you ventured to open up negotiations with the church?" queried Leffingwell.

Pierpont became peevish. "You must think I'm trying to book 'The Servant in the House!'"

The star sighed. "It was merely a suggestion," he uttered. "It's possible that the Methodists might——"

"Oh, turn over on your stomach and quit dreaming," broke in the manager.

They fell into silence, deep and dismal; and I, knowing full well the necessity of ingenuity to extricate us from the fell clutch of Culpepper Corners, set to cogitating among the possibilities which my lively imagination conjured up. Idly, I let slip the remark that if we only had the proper costumes we might give an open-air performance of "As You Like It" on Squire Peevie's lawn.

Leffingwell started up electrified. He shot a glance of triumph at Pierpont, whose little eyes widened with enthusiasm.

"Judas Iscariot!" cried the latter, and fell in a mock faint upon the chest of his partner.

"Ye gods, it's an inspiration!" elocuted Leffingwell. "Rudolph, my boy, I doff my pancake to you!" He pushed the manager off his chest and made me a guardsman's salutation.

Pierpont grabbed my hand. "Little Bright Eyes, the county throne is yours; also my drove of pink peacocks and the Lawson medal for first aid to the insured! It's a pippin!"

Walgrime, who had been regaling the feminine contingent with his experiences as leading man with Modjeska, shook his head. "It can't be done! In the first place, we haven't costumes."

"Costumes be ——!" grunted Pierpont.

"It will not be the first time that Shakespeare has been performed in modern dress!" declared Leffingwell. "Booth himself played *Hamlet* in street clothes on one occasion when his trunks went astray!"

"That's it! Our trunks have been sideswiped! We'll explain that to the audience at the last moment!" The manager was heeled with mendacity for any emergency.

Walgrime shook his head again. "You may be able to get away with that fake, but who in this company has a copy of 'As You Like It'?"

Even Pierpont was silenced by this question.

At length Leffingwell spoke. "Colley Cibber made his own acting version of 'Richard III,'" he avowed. "I shall make *my* own acting version of 'As You Like It'—from memory!"

After an execrable boiled dinner, served in shirt-sleeves and suspenders by the Squire himself, who enthusiastically donated the use of his lawn for our performance, the company reconvened on the veranda and began to take down our respective parts at Leffingwell's dictation. That is to say, we collected a great many speeches, short on Shakespeare and long on Leffingwell; but the star was so stuffed with an Elizabethan vocabulary that the lines lacked nothing in verbosity. Time and again Pierpont demanded that he cut the long speeches and get down to the action.

"Keep your lamps on the plot, Julius," he would caution. "Sublet the poetry and cuddle up to the comedy."

Julius was roaming grandiloquently through what he called the second act, when Pierpont called a halt. "Somebody's booked to turn amanuensis for me, while I get busy on the publicity end of this enterprise. I've got to get a front-page scream

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for this stunt in the Culpepper *Squib*, b'gosh! And paper every hitching-post and harrow from the town sewer to the suburban hayricks with red salutations and fervid affidavits appertaining to the fact that we are in the midst of this comely community about to pull off the first genuine *al fresco*, open-air, hippocanarious lawn-party performance of 'As You Like It' ever put up within easy walking distance of Culpepper's town pump." He paused to corral his breath and then asked, "When do we dare open?"

"At the rate of progress now apparent," rejoined the star, "we shall finish our version about midnight. It will take the company two days to get up in their rôles and——"

"Two days?" squealed Pierpont. "Do you think you're putting on 'The Darling of the Gods'?" He sprang to his feet and stood over his partner with a threatening finger. "Take it from me, Julius, you've got to cut out those Belasconian notions of yours! We'll never get out of this Gawd-forsaken hamlet if we wait two days! Consider the board-bills, how they grow! They toil not, but they sure do spin something awful! No, no, no! lymphatically no! We'll hand it to 'em to-morrow night, or I hit the ties in the morning!"

So it was settled. Leffingwell took up his partner's pencil as well as his own, while Gus streaked off to break the news to Culpepper. He returned late for supper, but triumphant. Already, he told us, the town ran red with posters, and avouched that with the break of dawn every highway and byway for miles around should shout the glad tidings, while the villagers should digest with their breakfasts a potpourri of Shakespearian plot and Pierpont promises, spread on the front page of the Culpepper *Squib*.

CHAPTER IX

LEFFINGWELL MAKES A "HIT"

WE TOILED at stenography until long past midnight and spent the next day in the barn studying and rehearsing. I was cast for the character of *Adam*. I thought I should have been given *Orlando*, who fell to Treffer. The star chose to play *Jacques* because he had the 'All the world's a stage' speech down pat. Pierpont drew *Touchstone*, and, of course, Jeanne got *Rosalind*. Play and cast were boiled down to mere shreds and so were the actors by the time we finished rehearsing, or rather stopped, to answer the supper bell.

We bolted that unsavory meal and set to scraping our trunks for such attire as we fancied would lend atmosphere if not authenticity to the play. Treffer turned himself out to look like a cross between Little Lord Fauntleroy and Jack the Giant Killer. I contented myself with *Deacon Crawford's* make-up, to which I added a goatee, a linen duster and a beanpole in lieu of a staff. Pierpont's idea of *Touchstone* was 'Sunny Jim'; Leffingwell was gotten up like an undertaker; Jeanne's first dress was a "nighty," festooned with daisies, and her Arden costume a pair of my flannel trousers, cut off at the knees, and one of Treffer's fancy negligée shirts turned in at the neck to show an alluring bit of her throat. Julia Marlowe in all her forestry habiliments never looked so roguishly fascinating.

The rest of the company were caparisoned more or less like Christmas trees. But this chronicle were lacking in symmetry if I neglected to mention Squire Peevie, who had joyously consented to double the rôles of gate-tender and *Charles*, the wrestler. Where he disinterred that wardrobe I do not know, but about 7.30 he took up his position at the gate, clad in a faded orange and black sweater, Zouave trousers and carpet slippers.

We had scarcely completed the setting of the stage, spread beneath a solitary chestnut tree and illuminated from either side by an ancient locomotive headlight, which Clutters had dug up in the village, when the fashion and frivolity of Culpepper Corners began paying toll and giving hilarious greeting to our gorgeous treasurer.

Dimes, quarters and even an occasional half-dollar fell with cheerful clink into the tin till, and so great was the demand for admission that by eight o'clock the Squire was selling seats on the back fence at twenty-five cents, and ten minutes later he stepped out into the road with a cowhide and collected a dime a head for standing room only.

"We'll have to play a return engagement here," cockily declared Leffingwell, surveying that genial swarm from the side door

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of the mansion where we were waiting to make our entrances.

"Don't get so —— ambitious," advised the manager; "but get busy with the show and rush it; they're in an amiable mood now."

NEVERTHELESS it was with trepidation that I made my entrance with Treffer, but the heartiness of the applause that greeted us gave me courage and all went well until Squire Peevie came on as *Charles*, the wrestler. Then a pandemonium of cheers, laughter and catcalls broke out. The Squire, however, was not perturbed. He stepped down to the first row of chairs and with a genial smile said:

"Neighbors, if you don't want the show to go on, we'll stop right here. We've got your money, and anybody that wants it back can have it—after he has licked me!"

That community had the sporting instinct. They encored the Squire's remarks, suppressed the more riotous element and told him to fire ahead; but when he lost the wrestling bout to Treffer, the audience hooted him again, rejoicing in his defeat, and were only silenced by Jeanne, who begged them in pantomime to listen to her.

The play limped on. It was without a doubt the most puerile, blatantly idiotic piece of mummery ever set before the public. For a time the novelty of an open-air show, the bizarre costuming, the antics of Pierpont and the fascination of seeing a pretty thing like Jeanne in pants, kept the audience in a good humor; but by the time we reached the middle of the second act, wherein Jacques philosophizes at great length, the people became bored and, finding no diversion in the play, the village cut-ups began to hunt amusement on their own account.

Leffingwell had just begun to recite, "All the world's a stage," when a cabbage aviated from the gloom and whirled toward the actor. Without pausing in his speech, he snatched it calmly out of the air and deposited it beside him. This feat drew loud hosannahs from the assembled hosts, and there were more encomiums when he deftly caught a potato with one hand and a turnip with the other.

"'Then, a soldier, full of strange oaths,'" continued the intrepid Leffingwell.

A shower of produce brought him to his feet, and as he rose, a succulent tomato squashed across his brow. At the same time Clutters, who was tinkering with one of the headlights, turned it toward the audience. Its rays picked out a large, pugilistic young man standing on a seat at the rear of the crowd, his arm flung back, poised for the hurling of another tomato. With the sudden and swift action of a practiced pitcher, Leffingwell delivered a potato, hurled with terrific force. It hit the tomato-thrower full on the mouth. He toppled over as though struck with an ax.

"'And so he plays his part,'" quoted Leffingwell, reseating himself.

For an instant it was so still that I could almost hear the molting of the chickens in the hen roost. Then the sporting blood of that audience made itself manifest. They cheered Leffingwell until they fairly wheezed, and the very instigators of the produce party policed the performance until the last mangled line was spoken.

"All's swell that ends swell!" laughed Pierpont as the star, Squire Peevie and I sat around the kerosene lamp in the kitchen that night and counted up the gate receipts.

"Never again shall I give a performance of Shakespeare on a truck-patch!" groaned Leffingwell.

"What are you kicking about?" snapped the manager. "You made the hit of the show; and the count-up shows a grand, sublime embezzlement of $113.70—absolutely clear!"

Squire Peevie reached a lean, muscular hand across the table and began counting the money out into two piles.

"What are you doing that for?" asked Pierpont.

"'Cause half of it's mine!" replied the Squire calmly.

It looked for a moment as though a riot was impending. In answer to Pierpont's vituperous protests, Peevie stuck out his square, bristling jaw and remarked:

"I don't want to commit no violence or other unpeaceable trouble, gennlemen, but you heard what I said. I give you my lawn fer your show, I made a ijit of myself playin' in it an' lettin' that skinny Orlander feller throw me—the champeen wrastler of this county; I took the responserbility of handlin' the money at the gate, and I've been boardin' your bum troupe three days on tick. This is where I cash in; an' if you don't like it, you can lump it!"

No one said him nay. There was some-

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thing about the set of his jaw and the play of muscles under his jersey, as he stretched out his arm and gathered up 50 per cent. of the gross, that discouraged argument.

"We don't have to cough up for our board, do we?" tentatively inquired Pierpont.

"Not a red cent!"

"In that case," puffed up Leffingwell, as though he had negotiated a most satisfactory settlement, "I agree to the Squire's proposition."

"It's been a pleasure to board you," grinned Peevie; "an' I'm a horspitable man; but you've got to git out bag and baggage in th' mornin'!"

"Do you know," confided Pierpont, as we stood on the platform of Culpepper station the next morning, "we wouldn't have had the price of our railroad fare to Puddleboro if I hadn't frolicked about ten bucks out of the receipts last night before that robber began counting up!"

CHAPTER X

A CHANGE OF CLOTHES

LEFFINGWELL'S Associated Players completed the longest jump of their tour when they struck Puddleboro. By reason of our enforced stay at Culpepper Corners we had lost two nights, and to catch up with our route, to overtake our bill-posting, we were obliged to skip the towns of Roaringford and Myrtlegrove, where we had been booked for Tuesday and Wednesday nights respectively. This long jump, fortunately enough, swung us off at right angles from the Corners, so that when we reached Puddleboro we were actually nearer home than we would have been at Roaringford.

I was glad to be advised of this fact when I looked over the village of Puddleboro. It slept a Rip Van Winkle sleep on the banks of a stagnant canal. The only visible means of support for the villagers was a tomato cannery, semi-active for one month in the Fall, and a coffin factory, which was patronized exclusively by home talent. Somebody, I was told, was sure to shuffle off during the course of the year, so it was the dead that kept that town alive while it slept. And I am sure, from what I saw of Puddleboro, that it was a good town to die from.

Besides the hives of industry above mentioned, Puddleboro revelled in a Main Street—about five blocks of miscellaneous, lopsided dwellings, punctuated at random by alleged stores. The canal cut the street in two, and a wobbly wooden drawbridge joined it together again. Hard by the bridge sprawled "The Hotel," leaning for support against an equally decrepit, clapboarded, unpainted and disreputable one-story building, which looked like an abandoned bowling-alley, but had the effrontery to call itself "The Opera-House."

As the company straggled past this depressing evidence of the town's amusement proclivities, I began, for the first time, to wonder whether, in spite of my genius, it would not have been better to stick to my stool in the substantial employ of those municipal contractors than to take my uncertain, though empyrean way, through this circle of derelict planetoids.

My spirits, however, rebounded when Pierpont turned from the hotel register and informed the company that things were looking up.

"Think of it!" he exclaimed. "There's an advance sale of $13!"

Fatal utterance! I was alone in my room, making an inventory of my wardrobe, which I found had been heavily levied upon for the adornment of Treffer, when I heard the voice of Jeanne piercing the board partition with unusual vehemence. I paused to listen.

"I won't play to-night," she asserted, "unless you come across with ten dollars before I leave this room!"

"But I don't like being stuck up in this way," growled Pierpont. "It isn't friendly."

"Do I get the ten or don't I?"

There was a hush for a moment. Then I heard Pierpont exclaim, "Oh, ——, take it!"

Presently I heard the door close, and then the voice of the manager.

"That girl's a miser!" he stormed. "She's copped fifteen bucks off me already this season!"

As I stood at the window a few minutes later, musing on the monetary maneuvers of our leading lady, I saw her enter the post-office across the street; and it flashed into my mind that a woman who had succeeded in extracting real wampum from Gus Pierpont deserved a Carnegie hero

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medal and ought to make a man a doughty partner in life's vaudeville.

This evidence of Jeanne's abilities in fiscal fields was like a charge of bicarbonate of soda to the still waters of my affection, and I resolved to deck myself forth at once in shimmering symphony, lure the lady to some sequestered spot and propose to her a perpetual pooling of our heart interests.

Thus happily resolving, I began to search among my effects for that particular and vivid combination of toggery, which I deemed necessary to the harmony of my tender enterprise. Those pale gray trousers, which went so prosperously with my blue serge coat, were not in the top, the middle, or the bottom of my trunk. Neither could I find my patent-leather oxfords, or the suite of socks, tie and shirt in chromatic shades of violet, although I emptied the trunk and scattered its contents in growing anger about the room. Perspiringly and peevishly I hunted again and again, until my mood became fit only for riot and bloodshed.

At that turgid moment, Treffer, cool and opulent, sauntered into the room wearing the very equipment I was in such a stew about; and I remembered then that he had appropriated those highly esteemed garments the day before and had worn them on the trip to Puddleboro.

"House cleaning?" inquired that curly-headed jackdaw, grinning at the disorder of my wardrobe.

"No!" I snorted. "I've been making an inventory; and I want you to understand once and for all that I am not going to furnish you with clothes."

"Nobody expects you to," he rejoined pleasantly; "but I wish you'd have these trousers taken in about two inches at the waist—they'd set better!"

I rose in my wrath.

"Take off my panama and my pants!"

He stared at me in innocent surprise.

"Why, Rudy, old boy, what's got into you?"

"You've been wearing my clothes off and on for two days," I exclaimed savagely. "It's time you gave them a rest!"

"Far be it from me, my dear Rudy, to tire out your fair accouterments, but I shall have to borrow your plumage until my trunk arrives. It was left behind, it seems, at the Corners."

"Some of the trunks went to the theater. Yours is probably there!"

"Pardon me, my dear Brummel," he chirped, "but my trunk is not at the theater. In the meanwhile you must own that I at least lend distinction to your trappings."

His cheerfulness and unblushing arrogance exasperated me all the more.

"Take 'em off just the same!" I barked.

"Modesty forbids!" he smiled, helping himself to a pipe-load of my tobacco.

"Take 'em off!" I vociferated, threatening him with a clenched fist.

Treffer gaped at me in hurt astonishment.

"You don't mean——?"

"I do! And be quick about it! I'll teach you to wear your own clothes in the future!"

Sullenly he threw the hat on the bed and savagely peeled off the trousers, muttering something about "the lost chord of friendship."

"If you tear off a button," I admonished, "I'll make you sew it on again! Turn those breeches right-side out and fold them as though they were your own!" He obeyed malevolently. "Now the tie, the socks, the shoes!"

"What?" he whined.

"Everything, from ruff to buskin, except the shirt; and I shall want that back when it comes out of the wash."

Treffer watched me in ominous silence as I repacked my trunk and locked it, leaving not so much as a toothbrush loose in the room. Putting the key in my pocket and the panama on my head, I turned to the door.

"Oh, I say, Rudy, old pal," quivered Treffer, catching me by the arm, "you surely haven't got the heart to leave me like this!"

"I surely have! You've got a coat and a shirt—what more do you want?"

"Just a pair of pants," he entreated.

"Take a towel and make kilts of it," I replied stoically and dodged out the door.

"I'll break even with you yet, you amatchewer actor!" he called after me.

That insulting appellation hardened my heart. Otherwise I might have softened and rescued him in time for supper; but now I was determined that he should remain a prisoner until seven-thirty, when I would send Clutters to him with the most disreputable pair of trousers the company could muster.

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CHAPTER XI

THE AWAKENING OF AN ANGEL

REVENGE may be sweet in the gulping, but it leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. Temperamentally I was not in form then for the exercise of those soft parts of speech and deportment which I believed necessary to insure a successful venture in the lovelists.

Thus I forbade myself the pleasure of rousing Jeanne from her retreat at the other end of the hall. I simply deposited myself in a lonely chair on the hotel veranda and dozed away until the clamor of a bell summoned me to supper.

"Where's Treffer?" inquired Leffingwell, looking over his family as we assembled at the table.

No one knew and I volunteered no information.

"How's the advance sale by this time, Gus?" asked Walgrime.

Pierpont corrugated his nose.

"About fifteen plunks, according to the astute compilations of the hotel clerk. It's the only graft he ever gets—handling advance sales, so I don't expect he's turned in more than seventy-five per cent."

"It looks to me like a crooked town," submitted the invertebrate Browleigh.

"It's so crooked that it sleeps in the shape of a dollar-mark," declared Gus. "And as for Mr. Dal. Furrows, the proprietor of that joint they've labeled 'opera-house,' I wouldn't trust him with the liabilities of a defunct bucket-shop. He was telling me this P. M. that he always held down the box office for the shows that played his house, and he would be glad to do the same for us. I rejoined that I'd let him take tickets at the door, but that I'd attend to the selling of 'em."

"You were quite right, Gus, to take no chances," assented Leffingwell. "I had occasion to speak with the varlet myself anent the bill-posting. It appears he does the work himself; and being color-blind and unable to read or write, he had made the most unharmonious, illiterate jumble imaginable. When I took him to task for his incompetence, he turned upon me with such profane language that I lost my temper and certainly should have administered to him a severe thrashing had not the barkeeper interfered."

"I wish you'd knocked his —— block off!" said Pierpont glumly. "I've got a hunch he's going to make trouble for us."

Mr. Dal Furrows did make trouble for us. I had just sent Clutters with a pair of overalls to the marooned Treffer, and was beginning to put on the grease paint, when the proprietor of the house kicked open the door of the dingy dressing-room, which I was sharing with Pierpont and Leffingwell.

"See here, you!" he began, addressing himself to the star—Pierpont was down front trying to coax a reluctant public to come in out of the rain which had perversely begun to pour while we were still at supper —"I gotta bill ag'in' ye for puttin' up them bills an' th' rent of this house! I tole that fat slob in the box-office that he'd got to pay 'em, an' he says you're th' boss an' tole me to see ye."

"Let me have your bills," replied Leffingwell coldly.

"I ain't got 'em writ down on paper!"

"You can't expect me to pay them until they are presented in proper form and O. K.'d by my treasurer, Mr. Furrows."

"I jist expect ye will, Mr. Lefferinwell. Ten dollars fer bill-postin' an' twenty-five fer rent——"

The star drew himself up to an outraged height. "Ten dollars for bill-posting? Why, I never paid more than five in towns twice the size of this!"

"Ten's what ye'll pay here!"

Leffingwell looked into the lean and aggressive countenance of Furrows and realized that he could not cope with him.

"You'll have to wait until I have consulted with Mr. Pierpont," he said; "and he can't leave the box-office just now."

"I'll wait here!" Furrows deposited himself in ogre-like silence on a trunk and watched us finish our make-ups.

"Eight o'clock!" announced Browleigh at the door.

"Send Clutters to relieve Gus at the box-office," ordered Leffingwell, "and tell him to make haste."

PIERPONT came in a moment later, looking like an honorary pall-bearer.

"What kind of a joint is this, anyway?" he grumbled, putting the question to Furrows. "I counted fifty people that came up to the door, looked in, and then shied off. Did you ever have small-pox here,

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or are they afraid the roof'll fall in on them?"

"Ten dollars fer bill-postin', and twenty-five fer rent! I guess that'll be 'bout all th' conversation I'll have with ye!" defied the proprietor.

Leffingwell took his partner by the arm and led him into a corner. "Don't stir that swine up, Gus," he counselled in a whisper. "How much money is there in the house?"

"Less than fifty dollars!"

"And Furrows insists that he must have thirty-five of it!"

Gus raised his voice. "The —— he does!"

"Overture!" cried Browleigh warningly from the door.

"Overture?" mocked Pierpont, tearing off his collar and quickly plastering his face with grease paint. "Cheese it, Brow! Mr. Furrows'll think you're calling him a bad name! Overture?" he began to laugh derisively. "Why, don't you know there's a law in this town against having an orchestra in the opera-house! Run along, Brow, and see that the scent of those Rockerfeller footlights don't chase the audience out for air! You can ring up in five minutes!"

As the stage-manager departed, Furrows gave his suspenders a hitch, spat licentiously upon the floor and said, "You don't ring up no curtain till my bills is paid!"

"I guess you think we're easy marks, don't you?" taunted Gus, jumping into a pair of chaparajos; "but you can't pull that budget of thirty-five plunks across my counter!"

"Then I'll jist step out an' tell th' folks they won't be no show to-night!" Furrows started toward the door.

"Go ahead, old rooster," urged Pierpont. "While you're speaking your little piece, me and my partners here'll be absconding out the window; and according to my calculation we'll just about be in time to catch the eight-thirty-one express that slows up at this tank for water."

Furrows paused. He was somewhat lacking in synthetic fancy, but he finally became cognizant of the fact that he was not the only financier in Puddleboro.

"Wall," he drawled, "I've gotta get somethin' on account afore ye begin!"

"That's perfectly proper," ventured Leffingwell. "I think——"

"Lie down, Julius," interposed Gus; "I'm conducting this settlement. You trot along and tell Brow to hold the curtain for a minute."

"It's eight-twenty-five now," temporized the star. "The audience is getting impatient. You'd better——"

"Beat it!" Pierpont shoved him out of the room and, facing about, surveyed Furrows with studious impudence.

The latter in turn gazed down upon Gus with a curious, wary expression. If you have ever seen a fat bull-pup sizing up a big loose-jointed hound, you will have a pretty good idea of the picture they made. It didn't look like the opening of a peace conference.

"You needn't be skeered," began Gus, "I'm not going to bite you; but this is my ultimato: we'll give you twenty dollars for the rent of this morgue and five dollars for damaging our paper—cash down on the spot."

Furrows considered. "Wall, I'll take it—on account!"

"You can take it anyway you like, but that's all you'll get."

"Gimme the twenty-five, then," said the other; "an' ye kin go on with yer show."

Pierpont counted the money out in small change and, calling on me to witness the payment thereof, handed it over to Furrows.

"Now sneak!" he ordered, showing the proprietor the door; "we don't allow canines back on the stage during a performance."

Furrows gave him a look of cunning malevolence and departed.

"I don't think you handled the brute very tactfully," I commented as we hurried from the dressing-room. "He's got it in for us more than ever."

"Don't you worry about that albino-hearted plug. I've got his goat!" laughed Gus. "Let her go!" he called to Browleigh, and the curtain rose, forty-five minutes behind schedule.

I DON'T remember much about that performance except that it took place on a stage whose cant was so steep that I was in mortal terror lest I should slip and plunge into those kerosene footlights, and that Treffer, dressed in an old suit of Clutters's, looked like something the dog had played with. He was absolutely surly—did his darnedest to queer

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every scene he had with me. Worse than that, he took a devilish delight in predicting that the Leffingwell Associated Players would see their finish in Puddleboro, and succeeded in putting a blight on every member of the company.

When I bade Jeanne good-night at the door of her room she was in such low spirits that a great pity somehow welled up in my heart for her, and I would have told her then and there, what I had been meditating for her happiness and mine if she hadn't dismissed me before I could recall the preamble of the remarks I had so often rehearsed.

I found as I left her that Treffer had also seriously interfered with the optimism of my nature. Therefore I was in a mood to give Hope her bell and burial when he opened up the obsequies as we prepared for bed.

"This is your finish, Mr. Barretsford alias Smink," he began with a chuckle.

"If it's my requiem, it's yours, too!" I retorted. "And you'll have the pleasure of returning home looking like a stagehand, for I've got a hunch your trunk has been lost in the outer darkness."

Treffer grinned. "My trunk's all right. I squeezed a dollar out of the management yesterday and expressed it home from Culpepper. If I could have raised the price I'd have gone with it. You see, Rudy, old boy," he went on, laughing at my look of concern, "I've had considerable experience. I knew it was ten to one we'd strand in Puddleboro."

"How do you know we're stranded?"

"I've just come from a conference with Gus and Julius. The receipts to-night were only about fifty dollars. Half of that went to Dal Furrows, and after the management pays our board bill, there'll be no more than five ducats in the treasury—just enough to get Gus back to town!"

"Is he going to leave us here?" I gasped.

Treffer smiled the smile of superior wisdom.

"Naturally, unless the landlord will be philanthropic enough to advance the price of transportation for the outfit on the trunks. As that isn't likely, Gus will make the bluff that he must get to town to raise the funds to bring the company home, and about day after to-morrow we'll get a picture postal from him saying that he's sorry but his bankers have gone abroad. Nice situation, isn't it?" he finished acidly.

"But what'll we do then?"

"I guess the walking is as good as ever!"

At that moment I could smile, too, thinking that at least I would not have to walk, for my little five-dollar bill was still intact.

"Will you tell me why such a smart chap as you ever joined this spavined company?" I asked.

"I was deceived—we were all deceived!"

"You mean in the bookings?"

"No! In *you!*" he gloated. And without giving me time to digest this remarkable statement, he continued, "You see, Leffingwell picked you for an angel——"

"Angel?" I echoed, puzzled.

"That is to say, backer, impresario," explained Treffer, snickering at my innocence. "From the careless way in which you permitted yourself to be assessed, both Gus and Julius were convinced that you could be depended upon, not only to launch the show but also to keep it afloat. Poor, trusting optimists! How you deceived them!"

Disillusion, disruption and decapitation—all in one demoniacal diatribe! Only in the subconscious part of me that still hovered about that place where an instant before my bodily sections stood unified was I aware of the fact that Treffer sat upon the bed, like a scrawny goblin, snugly enjoying my dismemberment. Slowly the disintegrated fractions of myself reassembled themselves. There seemed to be some friction in the process. I became aware of a frenzied desire to curse, to destroy; and it was with an expansive sense of luxury that I fell upon Treffer.

In a tangle of bedclothes and limbs we rolled upon the floor.

"Steady, old man, steady!" grunted the leading juvenile, as he pinned down my arms and sat upon my chest. "When you've finished breathing fire, I'll let you up."

I lay there limply while Treffer, with the suave glee of a paranoiac, performed a post-mortem on my fiscal relations to the Leffingwell Associated Players. He dissected every negotiation, from that counterfeit buying off of Henry Miller to his own sale of a battered make-up box, laying bare the utter asininity of myself and the ingenious pillaging of management and company.

"But you mustn't take it so hard, Rudy, old boy," he concluded. "You were a far, far better thing to do than we had ever

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done. The only trouble was you lacked financial staying qualities. When you told the sad story to your partners in Culpepper —told 'em that you had scraped the bottom of your bank-account — Pierpont nearly broke a blood-vessel, and as for Leffingwell, only his nerve kept him from swooning on the spot. It was a terrible blow to him, and you know he has a kind heart!"

"You're a bunch of liars and grafters!" I wheezed.

"Tush! Tush, Rudy! Some one else would have pulled down your little roll if we hadn't. And think of the fun you've had, of the experience you've copped off. Some day you'll have the pleasure of telling it with variations to your assorted offspring."

His last remark conjured up to me the image of Jeanne. It was with soothing satisfaction that I could recall no suspicion of sordid fraud on her part. She had even escaped Treffer's jocular arraignment. Out of all that murky mess of underground trickery, she shone like a lamp in a subway. Yes, one fond illusion remained to me! I hugged it in silence. It was worth everything just to have fed her.

Fate, I thought, had simply used Leffingwell and his crew to bring us together. There was no doubt about it. I knew Fate worked that way with affinities. What did it matter, then, if those conscienceless financiers had absorbed the patrimony of an orphan? I had Jeanne! And because of that it was in my mind to forgive them. Aye, I would even recast my lot with them —take a chance at being delivered from Puddleboro with the other members of the company—and send the gentle Jeanne home on that five-dollar bill which I had hoarded against just such an emergency.

CHAPTER XII

MIDNIGHT ANTICS

SLEEP was coy in the wooing that night, and just as I felt her lay the lotus on my lids, my bedfellow coughed.

"Are you awake?" he asked.

"No!" I breathed idiotically, thinking to silence him and still keep a grip on sleep.

"I'm sorry!" he sighed.

Sleep went out and slammed the door.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked with acerbity.

"I'm worried! Those trousers of Clutters's aren't fit to wear at a dog-fight!"

"Now see here, Treffer, you needn't think you can work on my sympathies. I won't let you have a stitch."

He raised himself on an elbow and spoke in a low, sad voice.

"I haven't asked you to. I was merely going to inquire if you knew where there was a tailor in this town. I must have those trousers pressed."

"No, I don't!" I turned my back on him and began making overtures to sleep again.

"Say, Rudy!"

"Shut up!" I commanded. "I'm not going to stay awake all night listening to your troubles."

Treffer sighed. "Oh, very well; but you'll be sorry in the morning when you find your trunk attached."

"What's that?" I sat up, suddenly alert.

"I thought you wanted to go to sleep," he mumbled.

"Why should they attach my trunk?" I persisted.

"For board."

"But you told me that Gus had money enough to pay our board!"

I saw Treffer's teeth flash in the darkness.

"So he has, infant! But as I was lying here, thinking things over, it occurred to me that Gus would probably skip the board-bill and take an early train. In which case your trunk would be attached with the others. That's all. Now don't disturb me again. I'm going to sleep."

"Don't be in such a rush about it," I scolded. "I don't want my trunk attached."

"I suppose you don't," he yawned. "Good-night."

I shook him. "Say, Treffer, don't be such a pig. You're a resourceful and experienced crook. Can't you tell me some way to keep my trunk from being attached?"

He pushed me away. "I refuse to be interviewed at this time of night. Besides, you've insulted me. I may have a touch of kleptomania, but I'm not a crook."

"I apologize! You're a gentleman and a sycophant!" I temporized.

"That's better; but say no more about it. Now let me sleep."

"Treffer," I coaxed; "if you help me save my trunk, I'll lend you that homespun suit of mine."

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"I wouldn't be seen in that suit on a Hackensack dump!"

"Be reasonable, Treffer! You're not in a position to pick and choose."

"Then save your trunk yourself, Rudy."

Desperately I inquired, "What do you want?"

"That same serene symphony—including the gray trousers, of which you so greedily stripped me this afternoon; and I don't propose to haggle with you about it."

Reluctantly I agreed and, following the lazy directions of my roommate, I got up, struck a light, laid out the coveted symphony and trousers and a change of clothes for myself.

"Now," instructed Treffer, "get dressed!"

"What for?"

"Clients shouldn't ask questions! They indicate a lack of confidence. Obey or I chuck your case!"

I got dressed.

"Have you locked your trunk?"

I locked my trunk.

"Take that rope," he ordered, pointing to the alleged fire-escape that hung on a hook by the casement. "Tie the end of it to your trunk, lower the trunk out the window and carry it down to the railroad station."

"Huh!" I balked, "I don't think much of that scheme!"

"Perhaps you've got a better one, Rudy. If you have, go ahead; but for heaven's sake get it over with. I'm dead with sleep."

I dragged the trunk to the window-sill and looked out. We were only two stories from the ground. I thought I could manage it easily. I took what I thought was a firm grip on the rope and pushed the trunk over the sill with my foot. It went off like a dreadnaught at launching. The rope burned through my hands, hot as a poker. I dropped it in pain and heard the trunk crash against a shutter below and strike the ground with a resounding thump.

"You blithering chump!" gurgled Treffer; "why didn't you hang on to it? You'll have the whole house up with your infernal racket. Put out the lights!"

I wrathfully obeyed.

"Ssssh!" he admonished, as I started to tell him how my hands hurt. "You'll have to wait a bit now."

"——," I muttered, "Gabriel himself couldn't wake this ossified beanery."

Treffer, however, was keen about my taking no chances, which only goes to show how honestly interested he was in my welfare. I began to kalsomine his character.

"That's all right, Rudy," he whispered; "you'll find out that I'll stand by you, if you treat me on the level. Now you'd better be following your trunk."

"Out the window?" I shied.

"Sure! It wouldn't be safe for you to go bumping around this caravansary in the dark. All you've got to do is to slide down the rope. I'll pull you up when you come back from the station."

"What do you think I am, an acrobat?"

"No, my boy, but for the love of Mike, don't be a mollycoddle. Wrap a couple of towels around your hands, twist your legs about the rope and you'll go down as gently as a submarine. I'd do it myself, just to show you, only I'd have to get dressed, and I'm very, very tired. Besides you ought to do it yourself. It's good practise. Learn now while you're young, so that in your old age you may be prepared, in case of a fire, to make a graceful descent if the flying-escape isn't perfected by that time."

Thus urged, I addressed myself to the wriggling manila rope, my hands mittened in towels and my courage reduced to a mere decimal. The last thing I heard Treffer say, as I flopped over the sill, was that if anything happened to me he'd tell the coroner it was suicide. I can only say that I remember nothing after that, except a particularly bright constellation, until I felt some peculiarly tickling ministrations upon my face. I raised a feeble hand of protest. It came in contact with the moist muzzle of what at first alarm I took to be some monster from out the realms of Morpheus, but which I presently perceived to be nothing more than an amiable calf.

HAVING roused me, the creature stood by and watched me with an air of mild curiosity as I sat up with the fortitude of a dishrag and felt of my bones. Incredible though it may seem, I had sustained no hurt but a growing lump on the back of my head, raised in apparent collision with the trunk. The trunk, I concluded from a hasty inspection, had suffered no more than I. About as agile as a superannuated mop, I surged to my feet, glanced venomously up at the window, thought murderously upon the stoical Treffer, loosed the rope from the trunk and started

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to drag it to the station, sore in body and mind. The calf ambled after me, an ironical embodiment of a motive power which no ingenuity of mine could reduce to practical employment.

Although it was only about two city blocks to the station, I suppose it took me half an hour to negotiate the distance; and when I reached there I didn't know what to do with the trunk, for of course at that hour in the night the place was locked up and the agent in bed.

"Well," I thought, "it will be safer here than at the hotel!" So I pushed it into a corner, between a pair of scales and a penny-in-the-slot machine, for company and protection, and limped back to the hotel, still accompanied by my friend the calf.

Then I tried to rouse Treffer. I thrashed the rope, threw pebbles into the room, but without eliciting any response. At last, getting the range at an angle, I apparently landed a hunk of sod on the bed, for I heard an explosive oath above me.

"Treffer!" I hooted as loudly as I dared.

He came to the window cursing.

"Be conservative!" I remonstrated. "You'll rouse the house!"

"Go to the ——!" he returned. "What do you want?"

"I want to be pulled up, do you understand, as carefully as though I were a basket of eggs. I nearly broke my neck coming down, and you never so much as bothered yourself to see whether I survived the descent. If it had not been for this kindly disposed calf, I should have been lying here unconscious at this moment."

"Well, I'm ——!" he ejaculated, laughing.

"I know you are, and it's this night's business that did it. And if you don't get animated and pull me up properly, I promise you that I'll check your carcass to purgatory in the morning. Are you ready?" I asked, noosing the rope under my arms.

He professed to be ready and willing, but his flesh was too weak, he said after several ineffectual efforts to raise me from the ground.

"You'll have to come up hand-over-hand, Rudy!"

My attempts to follow Treffer's suggestion were on a par with the Mt. McKinley exploits of Dr. Cook. I left a few records, in the way of serge samples, on a row of nails at an elevation of about 23 degrees Fahrenheit, and let it go at that. The hypothesis that one may be hoisted by his own petard can not be substantiated by my exploit.

"What am I to do?" I asked, as soon as I had recovered enough breath to make myself audible.

"I'll tell you what," cheered Treffer. "I'll throw you down a pillow. Take it and go find a comfortable board on the porch."

"What do you think I am, a dog?"

"It's very healthy sleeping in the open air, old man," returned Treffer insidiously.

"Never mind about my health; just sneak down-stairs and let me in!"

"I wouldn't dare; it might blow the whole plot," was his dialectical objection.

"But——"

Treffer interrupted me savagely. "I'm not going to stand here at this window catching cold just to argue with you! I've got to get some sleep. Do you want the pillow, or don't you?"

"No!" I hissed. "And in the morning I'm coming up there to break every bone in your selfish body!"

"Don't go away cross, Rudy," he called, as I made a pretense of hobbling off into the night. "I'll take a chance on letting you in at the door."

"You'd better, you pusillanimous pup!" I retorted.

Keeping on my way to the front of the house, I found, to my surprise, that the door was unlatched. Some friendly imp poked a quaint plot into my head. I skipped within the hall, cautiously closed the door and bolted it and effaced myself in the darkness. Anon I heard Treffer pattering in bare feet down the stairs. As I had expected, he stubbed his way to the door, undid the fastenings and, not seeing me, ventured out on the veranda and called my name. At that instant I shut the door behind him, drove the bolt home and scuttled gleefully up the stairs.

TREFFER was already under the window, mooing up to me, when I reached the room.

"How long are you going to keep me out here, old sport?" he asked, with a pathetic attempt at levity.

"I'm not going to keep you out at all. You can come up yourself, hand-over-hand.

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It will be good practise for you in case you should ever go in for jail-breaking."

"Quit your kiddin', Rudy, and let me in!"

"I can't argue with you at this time of night," I said kindly, throwing him a pillow. "Take that and go find a comfortable board on the porch."

"I'd be pinched for indecorous exposure!" He was clad exclusively in a union suit.

"Don't worry about that, Treffy. If you're nabbed, I'll get you out. I'll tell 'em you're a perfectly harmless nut. Now go to bed, that's a good fellow!"

I turned from the window and began undressing, ignoring the plaintive entreaties from without, until I'd got into my pajamas.

"Oh, are you still there?" I yawned, looking over the sill at him. "What do you want now—an eiderdown quilt?"

"Haven't you rubbed it in enough?" he whined!

"No!"

"Then for the love of heaven call off this calf!"

"It's a nice calf, Treffy. What's the matter with it?"

"The —— beast is using me for a pocket-handkerchief!"

"Don't curse the poor thing—that's the only way it's got to show its affection for you."

"I'll kick it in the slats if it doesn't stop!" he threatened, trying to push the calf away from him with the pillow.

"You'd better not; it might bite you," I warned him. "Make a noise like a toreador and maybe it'll run away."

Treffer used the worst language he knew, and he was a fluent cusser when he once got started, and jabbed the pillow at the calf, but it was all futile. The affable little beast thought he was playing with it. Snorting and galumphing about him, it seemed to be having the time of its life.

"If you can't put up a better fight than that," I scoffed, "I'm going to bed. This exhibition of your incompetence bores me."

"I'm tired of it, too," he panted, flinging the pillow at the calf and missing it. "I think you might let me in now, Rudy."

"What'll you give me if I do?"

"Anything I've got!"

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Treffy. I'll let you in if you will agree to surrender to me the Eastern rights to my sacred symphony and the gray trousers."

"That's taking a rotten mean advantage of me!" he grumbled.

"It's no more than you took of me."

"It's a wonder you don't take 'em without asking my leave."

"I'm no welsher, like you," I retorted. "What do you say?"

While he hesitated, the calf began nosing him again. He turned on it and gave it a swift box across the muzzle. It was a good-natured creature, and I must say it had stood a good deal from Treffer, but it didn't like being pushed in the face. It surged back for a second, then bounded for him and butted him fore and then aft with a nicety of precision and effect.

"Let me in, Rudy!" he desperately shouted. "I agree—I agree!"

And scrambling to his feet, the leading juvenile dodged the calf and ran for the porch as though he were propelled by gasoline.

"I hope you're satisfied," said he when a few minutes later we fell into bed.

"I am, thoroughly," I rejoined with a grin. "You look all chewed up!"

"I look worse than I feel, Rudy, while you're going to feel worse than you look."

"How is that?" I asked, my diaphragm sinking at his ominous remark.

"Why?" he returned blandly. "Because there isn't any danger of your trunk being attached. I was just horsing you."

Demoniac being! I considered throwing him out to the calf, but contented myself with simply kicking him out of bed.

"Now you stay there!" I commanded and, snatching the only pillow from him, I turned over and went comfortably to sleep.

CHAPTER XIII

JEANNE LEAVES PUDDLEBORO

LEAVING Treffer snoring on the floor, where I had kicked him in the night, I rose the next morning and dressed myself with great satisfaction in the symphony and gray trousers. I made a bundle of my other clothes, so that my roommate should have nothing for his adornment save his own coat and Clutters's rags, put them under my arm with my toilet articles and knocked at Jeanne's door.

"What is it?" she asked in a sleepy voice, after I had pounded thrice and heartily.

"It's me," I replied with ungrammatical

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intimacy. "Come to the door, it's most important!"

She came to the door, daintily making the best of her "nighty," which had little blue bows stuck on it in perilous places. Her hair, blond and curly, was done up in a blue ribbon. Sleep still dwelt upon her big blue eyes, but there was something sweet, fresh and fragrant about her. I fell in love with her all over again.

"Well?" she smiled blinkingly.

It was with no little difficulty that I subjugated my bucking heart and gave my attention to the explanation of the plan I had formulated for Jeanne's escape. I told her that the company was stranded, but that she need not worry, for I had money enough to buy her a ticket and send her home. I added that I proposed to get her trunk out of the theater at once, take it down to the station, check it with mine and put her aboard the seven-forty-three before the Leffingwell Associated Players got wind of my subterfuge.

Jeanne was adorably grateful, but she did not want to go without her breakfast.

"Perhaps I can manage to find you a bite outside of the hotel somewhere," I said, "but we must get you away before the others are stirring. If they knew I had five dollars concealed about my person, they'd make such a riot that I'd have to give it up."

She appreciated the situation and gamely agreed to take a chance at getting breakfast elsewhere.

"It's seven o'clock now, Jeanne," I resumed. "You haven't much time. Here's the five dollars. Dress as quickly as you can and sneak down to the station. Let nothing prevent your getting off on that train. Buy your ticket—it's $3.54—check my trunk, you'll find it there, and I'll have yours down in a jiffy."

So saying, I gave her a look that must have told her how it was with me, tiptoed down the stairs and deposited my bundle back of the clerk's desk. No one was about yet, but as I opened the front door I saw Dal Furrows, with a fishing-pole in one hand and a tomato-can in the other, leaving the opera-house. Instinctively I paused and, assuming an air of innocent idleness, sat down on the steps.

"I reckon ye be that actor feller I seen las' night with them pair o' skins in the oprey-house, beant ye?" he asked as he came up to me.

"Toot your horn," I replied, "and pass on to leeward; you're polluting the morning air."

"Ye can't josh me none, young feller. I'm goin' when I git good an' ready. An' afore I go, I jist want to tell ye that I've got the drop on the hull caboodle of ye!" Dal Furrows paused to pick up a worm that had wriggled out of the can. "An' ye can tell that lummox of a manager of yourn that I've took th' trouble to lock up th' oprey-house so as he can't git yer trunks. An' there they'll rot till he pays what's owin' me. Go blab that to him!"

"But we settled with you last night," I protested, thinking ruefully of Jeanne's baggage.

"Betche didn't," he grinned. "I says to that fat little runt, an' ye heard me, too, that I'd take th' twenty-five on *account!*"

"You're the meanest specimen of grafter I ever met!" I affirmed warmly. "But we'll find some way to beat you at your own game; see if we don't!"

"'Tain't worryin' me none. I know how ter put th' screws on pestiferous actors. I'm goin' fishin' now, an' I won't be nigh this place till evenin'."

With that, Dal Furrows sauntered off across the bridge.

I waited until he was out of sight, then gave my attention to the opera-house. The front door was securely locked and the shutters bolted. I went around to the back door. It was locked, too, but there was a transom over it, a semicircular transom, which looked big enough to admit the passage of Jeanne's steamer trunk. I mounted the doorknob and climbed through the aperture, handicapped considerably by regard for my handsome trousers. The deed writes more easily than it was accomplished. In the dim light of the theater I discovered that I had scraped three buttons off my coat and most of the skin off my wrists.

I HAD no time for self-pity; besides, it was blood spilt in a good cause, and I had no doubt that ample reward awaited me. The first thing I did was to examine the door on the inside. As I had surmised, it was equipped with an old-fashioned lock. It required a key to open it. There was nothing to do but to hoist the trunk through the transom.

I dragged it from the dressing-room, bal-

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anced it on the back of my neck and mounted a chair. The next move was more difficult. The trunk seemed to possess an obstinate personality, a lively contrariness. It upset my equilibrium so many times that I finally gave up my original method and, constructing a perilous flight of steps out of a property trunk, a packing-box, and a bow-legged chair, I at length succeeded in scrunching the perverse thing through the transom. At the same time the limbs of the chair on which I was performing collapsed.

Undaunted, but as peevish as the fretful porcupine, I reascended to the elevation from which I had been hurled. Thrusting my head through the transom, my eyes fell upon a living picture that set my heart bumping against my thorax. A bristling little man with an undershot jaw, a piratical mustache, a uniform once blue but now purple, and a dog of large dimensions and undoubtedly savage lineage, was standing beside Jeanne's trunk as though it were his personal property and looking up at me with an unmistakable air of being on the job. From the tin star on his chest, I presumed that I had to do with the town constable.

"Good morning!" said I affably, even cheerfully, which was better than most people would have done under the circumstances.

With a case-hardened expression, he asked, "What yer doin' up there, Bub?"

"What am I doing up here?" I repeated, cudgeling my brains for a convincing explanation.

"Mebbe ye could hear better if ye clumb down!"

There seemed to be a nuance of irony in his tone.

I ignored the suggestion.

"What am I doing up here?" I reiterated. "Why, can't you see? The door's locked and I was trying to open it on the inside, so that I could put the leading lady's trunk in the theater."

Rather pat, that!

"Go ahead, Bub, open her up!"

"I can't, it isn't that kind of a door."

"Then I'll hoist th' trunk up t' ye!"

"I couldn't think of bothering you," I remarked casually. "I'll manage it myself, thank you just the same."

"No bother a-tall," he insisted. "I used ter be a porter." He caught the trunk by a handle and swung it up to me with the ease of a juggler. "Grab a-holt o' it!" he ordered.

Spluttering with internal rage and mortification, I pulled the trunk in and dropped it on the floor.

"Now, Bub, if you'll stick yer laigs through th' transom, I'll give ye a lift down."

I looked out upon him hesitatingly.

"Don't be a-skeered," encouraged the constable. "I'll ketch ye!"

I didn't want to be caught, but I didn't dare tell him so, and I couldn't think of any excuse to stay where I was. I had an idea, though, that if I dropped suddenly I might squash him and effect my escape, but a glance at his dog, whose slobbering jaws seemed to threaten me, discouraged any attempt at strategy.

"I don't like the expression of your dog's face," I temporized.

The constable looked at his dog.

"It's a puffickly good expressun he's got. What's th' matter with it?"

"It may look good to you, but it doesn't look precisely amiable to me. I'm sure he's waiting patiently to take a bite out of me some place where I'd miss it. I'd feel better if you took him away and let me get down by myself."

"Shucks! Old Buck won't hurt ye none, onless I sick him on ye," he assured me.

"Still," I persisted, "I'm afraid to come down while he's there."

"Ye'd better come now while I'm here, or Buck'll keep ye up there all day."

"Can't you call him off?"

"He wouldn't budge, not fer me or anybody in Puddleboro," explained the policeman. "Ye see, Buck's got an idee that ye be up to somethin' crooked, an' he ain't gorn ter be satisfied till he sees me and ye havin' a drink together at th' bar. Curious dorg, ain't he?"

Reassured by this hint at petty graft, I slid down into the muscular arms of the little constable and, chaperoned by Buck, we invaded the barroom, where we drank each other's health in a savage compound of alcohol and vitriol that masqueraded as whisky. That done, I looked at my watch and realized in a panic that in two minutes Jeanne's train would be pulling out of Puddelboro.

"Charge those drinks to me," I cried to the barkeeper and bolted out the door.

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I had scarcely gone a dozen yards before I heard the yelping of a dog, and, glancing over my shoulder, I saw to my horror that Buck was bounding after me. There was no friendly tree in sight, no scalable shelter. So I plunged on, stumbling in terror, blind and profane. The dog was at my very heels now. Every instant I expected to be pulled down and chawed up. Instead of that the beast merely carromed off my legs, almost upsetting me, and in playful exuberance frisked about me.

MY RELIEF was so great, my gratitude so profound, that I believe I should have stopped to kiss the creature, but at that moment I saw the train standing at the station, and making a final effort, I sprinted for the platform. I reached it in time to see the train draw out, to catch a glimpse of Jeanne's wondering face at a window, from which she waved a hand and called out something about trunks.

I collapsed in my tracks and the agent hauled me to my feet. "You missed it that time," he took the trouble to inform me; "but don't worry, there'll be another at 3.33 P. M."

"Very likely," I rejoined with sarcasm that was wasted on him. "But it wouldn't do me any good if it came in now. She's gone!" I finished despondently.

"Oh, was you goin' with that actress?" he inquired keenly.

"No, but I wanted to see her before she went."

Of course I was put out because I hadn't had time to explain to Jeanne about her trunk, but I was much more cut up because I had meant to tell her precisely how I felt about her, and, in view of the fact that I was paying her fare home, I thought she would probably be in a more or less melting mood. Well, she was gone; so was the $1.45 change that should have been coming to me after the purchase of the railroad ticket.

But to do myself justice, I didn't care so much about the passing of my change as I did about the losing of an opportunity to wind up our romance according to my notion of a proper finish. However, I was sure that Fate was just postponing the glad day in order to tease me; and I assured myself that I would brook no more postponements, but would copper rivet Jeanne's consent as soon as I struck town.

I was still cogitating in this vein when the agent reaccosted me.

"I reckon you're th' feller she was waitin' fer to fetch her trunk, wasn't you?"

"I was."

"It's all right, then," he went on. "I checked one trunk fer her an' she give me a quarter to check another that she said you was goin' to fetch. I'd give her th' check fer it too, only it's ag'in' th' rules."

"Did she go off with the check to my trunk?" I asked, not precisely pleased.

"If it was yours, she did."

"I wonder why she didn't think to leave it with you, so I could have got it?"

"I suppose she kinder kep' it fer security," observed the agent. "You see, she tole me to give you th' check fer hern, which I'll do when you fetch it down."

"Very well," I replied coldly, not at all liking his theory, but, realizing that he probably meant well, I said more graciously, "I'll land the trunk here in time for the next train, and thank you for your trouble."

"Don't mention it. It's a pleasure to do anything fer a good-looker like her. I'd 'a' done it without the quarter."

"If you feel that way about it," I rejoined cunningly, "I'll return the quarter to her for you and be glad to do it. I fancy she's rather hard up."

"No," he drawled, turning my quarter between his fingers, "I wouldn't exactly like to do that; it might offend her. No," he added so emphatically that I could see argument was useless, "I wouldn't take a chance on it!"

"Suit yourself!" I rejoined more genially than he deserved, scorning him in my heart for being such a tight-wad.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WATCH THAT COULDN'T BE SOLD

MY FRIEND, the constable, sat on the front steps of the opera-house smoking a corncob pipe and industriously picking fleas off Buck.

"Hello, Bub," he exclaimed as I was passing, "did ye miss yer train?"

"No," I countered tartly, "I was just taking my morning exercise."

"Wall, wall," he chuckled, "ye sure can sprint some!"

I paid no further attention to him, but entered the hotel, intent on breakfast.

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When I came out of the dining-room, where I had fed in lonely state—it was only about eight o'clock—I was surprised to see Pierpont in close conversation with the landlord, for had not Treffer told me that our manager was going to leave Puddleboro on the early train? Wondering what had made him change his plans, I lit my pipe and wandered out on the veranda, where he presently joined me.

"What do you mean by running up a bar-bill?" he snapped without preface.

I had forgotten the episode of the drink drawn by the constable.

"Don't think it was for my own thirst," I combated. "It was a case of policy."

I drew his attention to the minion of the law who was still cluttering up the steps of the opera-house and recounted my interview with Dal Furrows and subsequent adventure with the purple policeman.

"So that's their little game, is it!" exclaimed Gus darkly. "Pinched our trunks, eh! Well, I'll show 'em! I'll have that baggage out inside of an hour, or they'll be dragging the canal to-night for the body of Mr. Constable."

"What's the use of bothering about the trunks, Gus? We're stranded!"

At that he turned on me almost brutally. "Who says we're stranded?"

"Treffer! Moreover he has declared that you are going to skip the town and leave us to get out the best way we can!"

I made these remarks with malicious satisfaction, recalling all that my roommate had told me of the ruthless manner in which I had been shorn of my money.

For a moment I thought that Pierpont was going mad. Treffer was undoubtedly a wretch, but he could never have qualified for the picturesque criminal that Gus painted him in swear-words of from one to ten syllables.

"I agree with you," I interposed as he paused for breath, "that Treffer is probably a liar, and I am glad to hear you contradict him. At the same time, I shall be glad to learn what you're going to do."

"No company of mine has ever stranded. I'm going to get the entire outfit back to town."

"How?"

"I haven't made up my mind yet, but I have a deal under way with the landlord that may do the trick. The trunks'll go by freight." He paused reflectively. "You haven't got about five bones tucked away in the sole of your shoe, have you?"

"I had, but I gave them to Jeanne to get her off on the seven-forty-three!"

Pierpont looked at me as though he had caught me picking his pocket, and I could see that he was about to lavish upon me the few invectives he had still left in his spleen.

"Hold on, old crook," I warned him. "You and your precious Leffingwell and the bunch of polite confidence men who are passing themselves off as your supporting company, collectively and individually, have buccaneered me to the tune of about $495! So I don't see why you should kick because I parted with my last five of my own free will. That's a privilege I reserve along with my freedom of speech and the right to digest my own food." Pierpont had the grace to blush. "Don't think that I'm sore about it," I hastened to interrupt him as he started to stammer something about my being utterly mistaken. "I'm taking it as a part of my education. It has been expensive but not devoid of recompense, though that's no fault of yours. I might have you and Leffingwell locked up for obtaining money under false pretenses, but I'm not of a vengeful disposition. I know now that you are a pair of sharks, but I feel perfectly safe with you because I'm broke, and, what's more, I shall stick by you till you get me home."

"I tell you, Rudolph, you don't understand," murmured Pierpont. "We can explain everything—why——"

"Yes, I know you're a fine explainer, the best I ever met; but don't try to explain to me. I know your explanations by heart."

"Well, all I can say," he offered in a hurt voice, "is that somebody has been lying about us, probably Treffer; and I'm surprised that you, knowing the ingenious deviltry of that dub, should let him string you."

"I wonder if Klaw & Erlanger would like to buy my interest in the Leffingwell Associated Players?" I asked irrelevantly. "Or whether Henry Miller wouldn't give me a couple of hundred dollars for the privilege of playing a great part, like *Deacon Crawford*, in that stirring heart-throb known as 'Golden Gulch'?"

"If you're going to take it that way, I won't bother to explain," moped Gus.

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"Thanks!" I said affably. "But cheer up. I'm the goat, not you!"

"Oh, I'm willing to let bygones be bygones, so far as that's concerned," he still sulked; "but what's sticking in my craw is —is—" he gulped emotionally—"to think that Treffer has been tampering with the tap of our friendship! That's something sacred!"

Gus wiped a tear elaborately from the corner of his eye with a fat forefinger and looked up at me with such a quaint air of battered innocence that I laughed and clapped the engaging rogue on the back forgivingly.

"Forget it, Gus!" I insisted. "It's all in the day's deeds!"

"I will, Rudolph, I will!" Pierpont stuck out his pudgy paw to me. I shook it, somehow feeling that I had treated him shabbily. "And, don't mention Treffer's precariousness to Julius, will you? It's an awful thing to put a man's faith on the blink! It'd break Julius's heart, he's that stuck on you!"

To this incoherent beseechment, I replied with genial enthusiasm, "Your sentiments do you credit, Gus! If I ever doubt your integrity again I shall think on what you've said. Tap my friendship for all I'm worth, it's all I've got left, and let's get down to business."

PIERPONT brightened up at this. "Touching the momentus, I've got a feeling that we're going to pull out of this hole spangled and embossed, now that we're collaborating together again," he chirped. "If we only had that five that Jeanne squandered on carfare it would be a pipe! Are you sure you haven't got something about you that we could convert into legal tender?"

"I have a watch."

"A watch!" he cried, with exuberance. "Why didn't you say so before? Let's see it!"

"It isn't much good," I observed, depositing it in his eager hand.

"Why? What's the matter with it? Doesn't it go?"

"It goes occasionally."

Gus put the watch to his ear. "It's going now!"

"That's because I just wound it up."

"How long will it go without winding, Rudolph?"

"That depends upon the weather, the day of the month, or something of that sort. I've never been able to quite understand its works. I've known it to run for half an hour; but usually you've got to wind it every ten or fifteen minutes."

He gave the stem a twirl and smiled naïvely.

"It's an undisputable fact that it does go! And furthermore it looks absolutely respectable. What do you suppose it's worth?"

"I bought it about three years ago for a dollar, and then I got stuck!"

Gus shook his head. "You must be mistaken. This is a solid silver case."

"It's nickel."

"But it shines up like silver," he persisted, rubbing the watch on his sleeve. "Would you mind leaving it in Puddleboro?"

"Throw it in the canal, if you like. I'm bored to death with it. I've spent the better part of the last three years in winding it up."

"Then take your last look at it, Rudolph; you'll never see its face again!"

"Who are you going to leave it with?"

"With our landlord, I hope," grinned Gus. "If he'll accept it in part payment of our board-bill, if he'll even allow us the insignificant sum of five dollars on it, we're saved!"

So saying, he beckoned me to follow him into the hotel and accosted the landlord as follows:

"Mr. Weiss, I find myself still short of the precise amount necessary to settle our account and to defray the expenses of transportation along the lines suggested by you in the course of our previous conference; but I have here a valuable watch, an heirloom, in fact—how long did you say it had been in the bosom of your family, Mr. Barretsford?" inquired Gus, turning to me with a sly wink.

"Years and years!" I committed myself.

"You hear what he says, 'years and years!'" He handed the watch to Weiss. "Look at it! Put it to your ear! It's got a genuine Dutch movement!"

The landlord examined it and listened to it solemnly.

"It ain't goin'!" he finally announced with a glance of suspicion at Pierpont.

"It simply wants winding," said Gus. "Just wind it yourself, and you'll see how

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nicely it winds. I don't think there's anything more satisfactory to a man than winding his own watch. You wind it and it goes, making good, keeping up your faith in the works of men." He cleared his throat and went on, "Now, Mr. Barretsford wouldn't barter that watch, he wouldn't even pawn it, for any amount that you'd offer. Would you?" he appealed to me.

"I couldn't!" I replied truthfully.

"There, you see, Mr. Weiss, he simply couldn't," expatiated Gus. "That's because it's an heirloom; but he's willing to leave it with you, temporarily that is, as security for our board-bill."

Weiss wagged his great head coldly. He didn't want a watch. He hadn't any use for one. The board-bill was $23.20, if we left before dinner. He'd knock off the $3.20, provided we'd part permanently with the watch. He had a nephew with a mechanical turn of mind who might buy the watch of him, but he wasn't sure about it. However, he'd risk that.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Weiss," countered Gus. "I'll pay the board-bill in full and let you have the watch for the price of the teaming contract you proposed. Five dollars it was, you know."

Weiss demurred, but at last permitted himself to yield to the persuasive sophistry of Pierpont, who insisted that I should retain the watch (to keep it going he afterward explained to me) until the eve of our departure, declaring that he hadn't the heart to separate me from it any sooner than necessary.

"What's this teaming contract?" I asked as Gus led me out to the veranda again.

"A deal in delivery that I framed up with Weiss. I'll break it to you when I get the trunks off my chest. It's a melon!"

Pierpont made an ocular examination of the constable and his dog, who still sat idly upon the opera-house steps like patients in a dispensary.

"He's got our measure, all right," I said. "Our friend Dal Furrows has no doubt subsidized him to hold the fort against us."

"Sure! You can see for yourself from here how the son-of-a-gun's wrinkles have etched graft on that pastoral panorama he calls his face. A thing like that ought to have a cage to itself, or be put quietly to death with dynamite. Moreover, I am not infatuated with his pup."

"You don't need to be afraid of the dog," I assured him. "He will eat out of your hat."

"That's one confirmation, anyway! I don't like abysmal brutes mixed up in my business!" Then, after reflecting a moment, Gus inquired, "Suppose we had it to give, do you think yon wart-hog would take a bribe?"

"He'd take a drink!"

"And a man who'd take a drink (I refer to the brand of disinfectants they hand out here) would take——"

"Stage money," I supplied.

Gus gave a start and swept my face with a look of combined wonder and admiration.

"Was that an accident, or did you speak with malice aforesight?" he probed huskily.

"What?" I puzzled.

"Oh, you squab!" bleated Pierpont. "Come away out of range of police observations and let me meditate."

I followed him to the far end of the porch, wondering what sort of devilment he was constructing in the back shop of his brain. I refrained from questioning him for fear of disturbing the machinery. At length I saw by the widening of his mouth that he had completed his combinations. His explanation of them was enthusiastic but obscure and, from what I could glean, seemed fraught with unnecessary danger. I so expressed myself.

"'If you conquer without peril, you triumph without glory,'" he quoted; adding out of his own invention, "To —— with expense—when it's stage money!"

Advising me to keep a casual eye upon the constable, Pierpont hastened into the hotel.

CHAPTER XV

THE AFFAIR OF THE PURPLE POLICEMAN

IN HIS absence I perambulated up and down the veranda, trying to fathom how he hoped to foist stage-funds on a man who was neither blind nor blatant. When he returned I ventured to protest that he had better drop the idea.

"Holy cat!" he exclaimed with impatience, "if you're afraid, go off in a corner and molt; leave the deed to me!"

"Oh, I'm no quitter," I retorted. "What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing! Just try to look intelligently

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unconcerned and act as though you were responsible. I think you'd better play with the dog while I hypnotize its companion."

So ordering, he leisurely led the way to the constable and accosted him with solemn suavity.

"I beg your pardon, but can you tell me where I could find Mr. Furrows?" he asked.

Without removing his pipe from his mouth, the purple policeman replied,

"I cud tell ye where he's at, but it won't do ye no good; ye couldn't fin' him. He's gorn fishin' down tew Somers's mill-pond."

"And how far is Somers's mill-pond?" persisted Gus.

The constable scratched his head.

"They ain't no road. Ye've gotta go down th' canal 'bout a mile er tew, then sheer off ter yer lef' an' foller th' railroad till ye come tew a yaller barn as sits up on a hill which is on Judd's farm. There's a crick t'other side o' th' hill, an' if ye walk up it byemby ye'll come ter Somers's mill. I don't jist know how far it be."

Gus appeared to be disconcerted by this information.

"Doggone it!" he fumed; "I had it all doped out to rub off my score this A. M. and jump to our next stand on the afternoon train. I wonder if there's any speedy citizen in this burg who'd be spry enough to hike a message to Mr. Furrows for a blue chip? I want some bright but honest person that I could trust to freight him quite a considerable wad. You see, I don't want to fly Puddleboro without giving Mr. Furrows all that's coming to him, and I figured that if I could only get the roll to him, he'd beat it back here and take the embargo off our trunks. Couldn't you scare up a messenger for me?"

The constable wasn't sure whether he could or he couldn't. Perhaps if the consideration was sufficient, he might.

Gus sat down on the steps and counted out fifteen genuine one-dollar bills. He counted them over three times and asked the police department to count them. When that worthy person had satisfied himself as to their number and authenticity, Gus recounted them.

"I don't want to make a mistake," he explained; and taking an envelope from his pocket, an envelope addressed in ink to "Mr. Dal Furrows, Proprietor of the Puddleboro Opera-House, kindness of bearer," he folded up the bills, tucked them into the envelope before the very eyes of the constable and, with a flourish, said, "I owe Mr. Furrows fifteen bucks!"

"Ten, he tole me," corrected the constable.

Gus looked surprised. "I thought it was fifteen, didn't you, Mr. Barretsford?" One of his sly winks accompanied this interrogation.

"I'm sure it was fifteen," I confirmed.

An avaricious light glowed in the constable's eye.

"Wall, mebbe it was."

"I don't want to have any question about it, so I'll let it go at fifteen," said Gus. "But for fear the bearer of this envelope might open it and frisk that doubtful five into his own pocket, I'm going to be on deck when Furrows comes back and ask him if the envelope was tampered with. In case it was tampered with, I'll have the culprit put in jail; but if the envelope is delivered intact, and I find by examining my accounts that I've overpaid Furrows, I'll make him give the messenger the extra five, and hand said messenger a bean on my own account."

The little policeman's face was a mirror of constantly changing and conflicting emotions as Gus delivered his complicated threats and promises, but as the ingenious manager concluded, I thought that I saw a residuum of satisfaction scatter over that plastic countenance.

"Ye ain't got much faith in human nater, Bub," drawled the constable; "an' seein' how ye feel 'bout it, I don't calculate I cud fin' any one tew run yer errant."

"You wouldn't care to take on the job, yourself?" insinuated Gus.

After a moment's pondering, the policeman replied,

"I ain't hankerin' after th' job, but—gimme th' envelup—I reckon ye'd better trust it to me."

"I must have a receipt for it;" and to my surprise Gus gave the constable the envelope.

The constable took it and held it up to the light to satisfy himself, no doubt, that the money was still there. Then he wrote a receipt in pencil on the back of a handbill, and saying that he and Furrows ought to be back "along 'bout noon," he thrust the envelope in an inside pocket and, followed by his dog, trudged away over the bridge.

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"WELL, of all the——" I began.

"Shut up!" warned Gus out of the corner of his mouth.

"What's there to shut up about?" I persisted. "You lost your nerve, didn't you, and now——"

"Lost my nerve?"

"Yes, I thought you were going to give him stage money!"

Gus clapped a hand over his mouth and, staggering around the corner of the opera-house, leaned up against the wall and exploded mirthfully.

"Why, you boob, you!" he guffawed. "Open that!" He pushed an envelope into my hands. It was also addressed to "Mr. Dal Furrows, Proprietor of the Puddleboro Opera-House, kindness of bearer."

Mechanically I opened it. It contained the fifteen genuine one-dollar bills!

"How in thunder——?"

Gus grinned.

"Perfectly simple, mere child's play, my dear Watson. That Scotland Yard man, with his usual stupidity, kept his lamps on my face when he should have kept them on my hands. There were *two* envelopes, prepared in advance. One was loaded with stage money. The other you saw me charge with the real Governmental dough under the nose of the enemy. While we were proving to each other that honesty was the best fallacy, the envelopes became hopelessly mixed. And with the stage money now on its way to Dal Furrows, we will draw a hasty veil between us and the subsequent events, thus concluding the Affair of the Purple Policeman. And while I think of it, my dear Watson, if you should ever write my memoirs, pray omit this episode—the truly beautiful is not for the masses."

"You're the——"

"No compliments, Rudolph," he enjoined. "We have a bare two hours in which to scale the walls of Puddleboro. I want you and Clutters to get the trunks to the railroad station and have them billed home—freight collect. I'll have a wagon at the stage door for them in five minutes. Clutters had better break in with an ax—we have no time for refined measures. By the——"

Gus stopped to beckon to Leffingwell, who had come out on the porch and was standing there, picking his teeth, just as though life were an upholstered Pullman and he the only porter on the train.

"See here, Julius," began Gus, "you've got to get busy. We've worked while you slept."

"My dear Gus," chided Leffingwell, "you have but to speak and I shall perform to the utmost of my ability. How are you this morning, Rudolph? Did you sleep well?"

"Cut it, stow it, file it off, Julius," boiled Pierpont. "If we're not out of this water-tank in an hour, you'll be doubling up tonight with the rats in the Puddleboro jail. Go chase Clutters out here and tell the company to be ready to pull freight at ten o'clock."

"But there's no train until three!" objected Leffingwell.

"Well, I've engaged a special!" thundered Gus, and disappeared into the hotel, dragging the star after him.

CHAPTER XVI

A STRAW-RIDE

BY THE time Clutters and I had jimmied our way through the stage door and piled the trunks outside, Gus Pierpont, himself, appeared, a Billiken in the rôle of Jehu, whipping up a pair of dispirited nags that dragged behind them a rattling truck upon whose spare ribs already reposed the hotel baggage. Under his advice, we expeditiously loaded it, for by this time my experience as a baggage-smasher was such that I could have qualified for the post of porter to a Smithsonian jungle expedition, and drove with careful haste to the railroad station. There I checked Jeanne's trunk, while Gus saw to the billing of the others and Clutters returned the team to the hotel livery.

"Bless'd be the ties that bind!" exulted Pierpont, waving his receipts and calling on me to quicken my gait as we footed it up the dusty and drowsy street. "The trunks are in the tentacles of that octopus known as the Delafare & Centipede R. R. Company, which combines with its propensity for giving rebates to the Sacred Oil Company, a grim determination to have and to hold all goods that fall into its maw until delivered at destination, and the charges for such sanctuary offices paid for in full. Do you understand, my dear Watson, or do you wish me to draw you the front and rear elevations of my plan?"

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"As your physician and friend," I replied in kind, for his good humor was contagious, "you'd better cut out that dope, Holmes. It produces a false excitement of the nerves which may ultimately wreck your brilliant career before the gum-shoe men get you."

Gus linked his arm in mine and announced with a commendatory nod,

"You're brightening up, Rudolph. I believe you actually have the makings of a genius!"

"If you ever intimate that I'm a genius again," I growled, "I'll slay you!"

"Leave that to the purple policeman. Once we are safe aboard the lugger—hah!" he interrupted himself, "There she is, waiting for her cargo of actors and other junk!"

My astonished eyes beheld a four-horse team attached to a hay-wagon half filled with straw, drawn up in front of the hotel.

"Is that for us?" I gasped.

"Sure! I've chartered it for a couple of hours."

"For a hay ride or just for pleasure?" I sneered the question.

Gus dropped my arm and turned upon me with one of his sudden transitions:

"You lily-livered lump of luggage, you ought to get down on your knees and purr to me! That's what you ought to do, do you hear? I've been squeezing my brains and working my vocal chords and pumping at the well of my ingenuity for hours to negotiate this get-away. Anybody else would have ducked the town and let you dig your way out for yourself—you, and all those other boobs who think they're actors! If you don't like that hay-wagon, you don't have to ride in it! You can walk!"

"You're the Colossus of the Road, Gus!" I said admiringly, and that satisfied him. "Do you mind telling me where we're going in that rig?" I asked, winding up my watch and handing it to him.

"We're going to the end of a trolley-line about ten miles from here; and that line is one of a chain and a few gaps that will eventually land us in town—if the carfare holds out!"

"Baedeker could say no more! But suppose the carfare does not hold out?"

Gus shrugged his shoulders.

"The ravens fed Goliath. You can never tell who's going to pay your carfare."

While he was settling with the landlord, I uncached my bundle from behind the clerk's desk and joined the rest of the company, who were now climbing into the hay-wagon with the cheerfulness of children starting on a picnic. Leffingwell, himself, sported a dignified, proprietary smile as he directed his players to embark and gallantly handed up the slim Eugenie and perspiringly boosted up the plump and giggling Mrs. Bellows.

"Where's Treffer?" asked Pierpont, as he took his place on the front seat beside the driver, a lanky youth in an old straw hat and faded jumpers. At that moment Treffer appeared, looking as forlorn as a picked peacock, with a handkerchief tied about his neck in lieu of a collar and Clutters's baggy and dilapidated trousers flapping about his lean shanks.

The company set up a howl of derision, but the best dresser on and off smiled a tolerant smile and remarked as he climbed aboard,

"Rags are royal raiment when worn for virtue's sake!"

"You look almost ugly enough to be artistic!" said Pierpont, waving his hand to the assembly of small fry and other citizens gathered to see us off, and calling farewell to the landlord, who came out on the veranda, winding my watch.

As we mounted the first hill beyond the bridge I chanced to look back in the direction of the canal and afar off along its bank I described two male figures running toward Puddleboro. I pulled Pierpont's sleeve and called his attention to them.

He looked and, after a moment's study, asked me in a whisper,

"Do you think it is?"

"It are!" I replied. "The constable and his confederate in skin!"

We topped the hill.

"Bill," lisped Gus in suave cadences, addressing himself to the driver, "don't you think you could get a little more speed out of this yawl?"

Bill thought he could and did; and as the miles rattled behind us, my spirits rose commensurately, for I felt then that we had seen the last of Puddleboro, the purple policeman and the pilfering potentate of the playhouse.

Before us, no doubt, lay many an adventure, but at the worst we would only have to cope with the cupidity of car conductors and the corsairs of caravansaries.

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CHAPTER XVII

FROM PUDDLEBORO TO SKENKSVILLE

IF THE landlord of the Puddleboro hotel had devoted himself industriously to the winding of my watch, it was probably articulating the information that high noon had arrived when the Leffingwell Associated Players rumbled happily but hungrily into a hamlet which, according to Bill the driver, answered to the name of Quibbleton. We called it other things after we learned that the only hostelry in the place was "The Yellow Hornet," which had so acquired the habit of fattening itself on motor-millionaires that it had forgotten the bar-courtesy known as a free lunch.

"Stung!" was the obvious but fitting remark of Gus Pierpont as he emerged from the door of that greedy rookery and informed his compatriots in the hay-wagon that "The Yellow Hornet" harbored no such mental menus as pie and milk and sandwiches and coffee. It merely served chicken and waffle meals at a dollar-fifty a head; and as for the time-honored *gratis déjeuner*—panderer of poverty—it was an extinct form of entertainment in Quibbleton.

"Churls!" sneered Leffingwell. "I shall never set foot in this town again; no, not if they should offer me a guarantee of a thousand dollars a night!"

"Thinking it over," said Pierpont as he resumed his seat beside the driver, "I am satisfied that it is all for the best. Noon is an unfashionable hour to feed. I favor the English custom—tea at five o'clock. Drive on, Bill!"

The terminus of the trolley-line was at the farther edge of Quibbleton. It was marked by a shed, from which a wabbly single track stretched away capriciously on one side of a dusty turnpike. Here the company disembarked and bade the driver a cheerful farewell.

"William," said Leffingwell, digging into his vest pocket, "here is a small gratuity, which I trust you will accept, not as worthy payment for your services, but rather as a token of the regard in which I hold you. I have shared the box seat of a coach with Alfred Vanderbilt, but I must confess that you wield the ribbons of a four-in-hand in a fashion that rivals the dexterity of that famous whip!"

Speechless before the elegant manner and eloquent speech of the star, the driver took the dime and, biting it—more out of habit, I should say, than intent to impugn its integrity—thrust it into his pocket and, with a solemn smile at the company, wheeled his horses and drove off toward Puddleboro.

"Look-a-here, Julius," protested Pierpont aggressively; "what do you mean by giving that yap the dime I loaned you this morning for pocket money? Do you think you're Vanderbilt?"

Leffingwell raised a hand with the air of a monarch silencing an obstreperous minister.

"My dear Gus, I always subconsciously remember that I am an actor and a gentleman, and as such it is incumbent upon me, however low my exchequer, to reward a service, even in so humble a fashion."

"Suffering Bathsheba!" snorted Gus. "I suppose if it had been a quarter you'd have handed it out just the same!"

"I probably should," returned Leffingwell.

"It's a cinch that you can't be trusted with money," finished the manager, turning away to watch the approach of a trolley-car.

As it came to a standstill in front of the shed, the motorman gave the company a look of impudent gaiety, unhooked his lever, and, catching up a dinner-pail, picked out a shady spot across the road where he addressed himself to his luncheon. The conductor walked through the empty car, gave the register a spin and was about to follow the example of his crewmate, when Pierpont hailed him. After a brief colloquy they parted, the conductor to his *al fresco* meal and Pierpont to the steps of the car whither he beckoned Leffingwell and me to join him.

"We are somewhat up against it," he remarked, turning out his pockets and striking a cash balance of $5.37. "I am informed by an official of the corporation that operates this one-horse-power car that according to the most conservative estimate it will put us back $1.60 per head to trolley it home."

"That seems reasonable," said the star.

"Reasonable, but not feasible!" sententiously retorted the manager. He figured for a moment on a scrap of paper. "There are nine of us. Nine times $1.60 is $14.40. We are $9.03 to the bad."

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"You must be mistaken, Gus. Let Rudolph perform the computation; he has a talent for figures!"

"Gus is right," I nodded. "I've done it already in my head."

"Really?" Leffingwell's admiration and worry were crushed together in the one word.

"Have you nothing to suggest, either of you?" asked Gus impatiently.

I suggested that he was the promoter of the enterprise and best equipped by sagacity to do the suggesting, but he declared that he was "spun out," and that we'd have to draw on our own invention.

"For my part," decided Leffingwell, "I think that courtesy demands we should donate $1.60 each to the ladies of the company that they may reach the city without further embarrassment, and that the gentlemen make shift to travel by rail as long as the funds hold out. After that we can at least walk!"

"Spoken like a sport and a spendthrift!" exclaimed Pierpont approvingly. "I'm game for it, if Rudolph is!"

"My esteemed partners," I replied with warmth, "I am proud to cast my house and lot with such a pair of paradoxical and chivalrous souls. And now my mathematical mind tells me that having transferred $1.60 each to the ladies of the company, we shall have remaining the sum of $2.17, which divided into seven parts, reduces the individual male apportionment to thirty-one cents."

"Correct," announced Gus, figuring fervidly. "I shall distribute the coin accordingly, constituting myself, however, the custodian of Julius's share of the pelf for fear he might subconsciously tip the motorman."

THERE was some grumbling among the men when Pierpont explained the situation to them, but Browleigh accepted his division of the funds with that optimistic, babes-in-the-wood faith in an all-sheltering providence so characteristic of his tribe.

"There's only one thing you haven't provided for, Gus," said the cheery Mrs. Bellows, as we took possession of the car.

"What's that?" bit Pierpont.

"Our five o'clock tea!" she sniggered.

"If some gentleman or lady in the audience——"

The sudden starting of the car interrupted the manager and flung him into the comfortable lap of Mrs. Bellows.

"I like your orchestra chairs," he advised the conductor, "but I don't care for your pneumatic usher."

"You did it a-purpose, Gus," coquetted Mrs. Bellows, pinching him. "Get up!"

"I wouldn't get up only the stage-manager is calling my turn!" Pierpont rose with an exaggerated bow. "And now, ladies and gentlemen, if some one in the audience will kindly lend me a watch and a powder-puff, I'll proceed to make an omelette and a pot of tea in my hat."

Imaginatively furnished forth, he went through the motions of a prestidigitator.

"Fares, please!" cried the conductor, tacking through the car.

"You'll have to wait until I finish this omelette," joshed Pierpont.

"Who's the keeper of this bunch of nuts?" retorted the conductor.

The *entente cordiale* thus established, we diverted ourselves and the crew under the voluble direction of the manager.

"Miriam Bellows, the famous impersonator, will now give us an imitation of Tetrazzini before the Riviera!" he announced. "After which thrilling act, the immortal Leffingwell will render that pathetic ballad entitled 'Cross-Eyed but True!' And just to demonstrate the élite quality of our program, he will be followed by Treffer the Tramp in his original monogram, 'Pickled Pants, or the Haberdasher's Halo!' The orchestra will please refrain from making any unnecessary noises while Master Rudolph Barretsford recites that heart-pealing piece, 'The Angel Child,' otherwise known as 'The Lost Hoard!'"

Clutters was in the midst of "Casey at the Bat" when the conductor stopped the car. "Sorry to interrupt your spiel," said he, "but this is the fare limit."

"The fare limit?" exclaimed Leffingwell.

"Yes, sir! You've got to pay another fare here!"

"Why—to begin with; also, why so soon?" inquired Gus.

"You can see fer yourselfs," drawled the conductor, advancing to the front of the car and pointing to a tin tag which hung, like the number of an automobile, from a cross wire just overhead. "Fare Limit!" it read.

The fare limits were frequent and close

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between on that suburban line, but neither their frequency nor the occasional entrance and exit of a stray passenger dampened the ardor of our vaudeville Marathon so long as Gus Pierpont acted as pace-maker; but as we drew near the town of Skenksville, he yielded up the post to the professional Browleigh and dropped into a seat beside me.

"I see, Rudolph," he began, "that you are toting a suspicious bundle. Is it perchance something in the way of nutriment, or mere personal paraphernalia?"

"It's a change of clothes."

"How luxuriously superfluous, and you clad with the fastidiousness of an all-star cast!"

"I'm not lugging these clothes about for the sake of vanity," I explained, "but to keep them from that kleptomaniac of a Treffer." I could almost hear the works of his invention grinding out some Jesuitry. "Don't exert yourself, Gus," I cautioned. "I'm not the gullible archangel I was two weeks ago. If you have any evil designs on this package, out with it in words of one syllable, for I haven't time to take it home with me for microscopic examination."

"You're coming on," he grinned, and added confidentially, "I was just thinking that we'd be reduced to eleven cents per when we reach Skenksville, and that eleven cents would probably only transport us to some fare limit in the waste places. Therefore, be it resolved, to wit, that we, jointly and collectively, repair ourselves to a pawnshop, if such an institution exists in yon metropolis, and pull down a few bones on your superfluous wardrobe."

To this frank proposal I gave ready consent; and at the same time I observed that Clutters, Treffer and Walgrime were in close and exclusive caucus on the back platform. I called the attention of Pierpont to this apparent infraction of the unwritten rules of *camaraderie*.

"If they are framing up a declaration of independence," he purred, "we'll give them all the liberty-bell rope they want. They are the original tea-party Indians, especially Walgrime and Treffer. They were the main kickers when I passed the word that the girls were to be shipped through, freight prepaid. I'm sorry to see an absolutely good property man, like Clutters, consorting with two such palpably bad actors. Say nothing about our wampum expectations; the plot thickens!"

By this time we were in the midst of Skenksville, which seemed to be quite a brisk town for its size. A panoramic glance at the main thoroughfare gave promise of pawn-shops and thirst-parlors, those life-saving stations which an effete civilization has strung along the Appian Way of the impecunious.

We were presently informed by the conductor that we had reached the end of the line and that if we wished to continue our tour we should move on to the terminal of the Skenksville & Moccasin Falls Traction Company. So off the company straggled, Pierpont and I leading the way, Leffingwell and Browleigh convoying the women, and Clutters, Walgrime and Treffer lagging in the rear.

"Don't look behind, Rudolph," warned Gus, as we turned a corner. "Give the renegades a chance to bolt. One of 'em has doubtless found a dime in the lining of his vest, another is a personal friend of the boss of this burg, and the third, probably Walgrime, has a pass over a free-lunch route. They're not carrying any excess baggage like you and me!"

"What did I opine?" he laughed behind his hand when we reached the S. & M. F. terminal without the three dissenters. "They've lost us in the shuffle."

Consigning the women to the first car that left the barn, and directing Leffingwell and Browleigh to take no bad money in our absence, but to wait for us and pray, Gus and I scouted through the streets and finally hung up my superfluous wardrobe in the three-ball establishment of a human bat. Oh, Gentile reader, rail not at the pawnshop! It is the poor man's bank, the rogue's depository, the wayfarer's *Crédit Lyonnais* or *Au Gratin!*

With $4.25, the gross receipts of our transaction, we raided a rapid-lunch counter and bore off a motley menu of pallid pies and slab sandwiches.

"I know this is a piece of arrant extravagance," chortled Gus, as we tripped back to the terminal, "but I had rather ride less on a full tummy than ride more on a vacuum."

I agreed with him, and so did Leffingwell and Browleigh, to whom we gloatingly described the unsociable strategy of the revolutionists.

"Their conduct," mumbled the star, tucking a refractory raisin into the corner

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of his mouth with a supple thumb, "is highly reprehensible, and I suggest that in the immediate future at least we avoid their company as they have seen fit to shun ours."

"Sure!" advocated Gus. "Let them C. Q. D. on their own wireless!"

There being no disputing voice, we watered ourselves at a convenient spigot and proceeded to finish our humble fare aboard a car, which whisked us out of Skenksville with funds sufficient to carry us within twenty miles of home, a righteously contented quartet.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONNING THE CONDUCTOR

NATURE cut out the reds in her footlights, threw in the ambers and put the dimmers on the borders, giving us a very soft and convincing twilight for the last stage of our journey, which began afoot far out among the "fare limits" of a desolate country road. The last eight or ten miles behind us we had negotiated under the most humiliating circumstances. When we had paid the final nickel and been ejected from the red-plush seats of the Boilstown & Ringate car, which we had grown to regard with almost proprietary affection, we waited in the road for the next car and, taking our seats well forward, engaged in earnest conversation until the conductor insisted that he must have our fares.

Slowly then, in order to consume as much time as possible, for every second gained meant the saving of just so much shoe-leather; slowly then, I say, Gus would begin searching his pockets elaborately. There was acting for you! Unbelief, anxiety, alarm, consternation, flashed in turn across his mobile countenance! Suffering kittens! He had lost his pocketbook! Well, well, no matter. Mr. Leffingwell would have to pay the fares. Mr. Leffingwell would be delighted. He owed Mr. Pierpont an apology for not volunteering to pay the fares in the first place. How much was the fare, anyway? Twenty cents? Oh, certainly! Fares were the same, then, on all the trolley-roads? Yes! But he knew districts where the rate was three cents! Of course, he understood that the conductor had nothing to do with the making of the tariff, but—— Patience, Mr. Conductor! No doubt the purse is in the other pocket! No? How strange! The chromatic scale of the histrionic art is not slighted, not even slurred, in the eloquent pantomime of Mr. Leffingwell. To the previous efforts of his compatriot he adds grace notes and a cluster of coloratura cadences, any one of which is worth the price of admission.

But the climax of his solo is not consternation. He is a man of infinite resource! Smilingly, he turns to his friend, Mr. Barretsford, of whom he would borrow a paltry twenty cents! But Mr. Barretsford is not that kind of man. Nonsense! Mr. Barretsford will pay the fares himself! They wrangle over this point, while the conductor, beginning to grow suspicious, bids Mr. Barretsford "get a gait on!" Mr. Barretsford is not used to being spoken to in that manner. If the conductor is not more civil, Mr. Barretsford will complain in person to the management, and takes the occasion to point out in the list of rules and regulations, posted over his head, the clause instructing employees to be courteous to passengers.

That's all very well, but when Mr. Barretsford finds that his pockets have been picked, the conductor ignores the rules and regulations and threatens to throw the quartet out of the car. At that, Mr. Pierpont, insulted and indignant, restrains Mr. Browleigh, who is drawing his hand from a pocket with a clearly defined impulse to pay the fares or hit the conductor, and pulling the bell, waddles angrily out of the car followed by his associates, whose *hauteur* is nothing less than majestic.

This performance we repeated with more or less *éclat*, and with comparatively little damage to our respective persons, until we had weathered the settlement of Ringate and started on the twelve-mile homestretch. By that time our pride was hammered to a pulp and our stage effects reduced to unconvincing mummery by too much repetition, so that instead of making our not infrequently graceful and dignified exit from a car, we found ourselves severally and collectively tossed from a platform by the combined efforts of a rude and athletic crew.

"Henceforth," remarked Leffingwell, as he recovered his hat from the ditch and dusted himself, "I walk!"

"At the rate of three miles an hour," said Browleigh, "we should reach home about midnight."

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"We'll do better than that," contended Gus, stepping into the middle of the track and preparing to signal a car which had just topped a distant hill.

"I positively refuse to lay myself open to such humiliating treatment again," protested Leffingwell.

"You won't have to," averred Pierpont. "I've got an entirely new and unexpurgated scheme. My ingenuity ran down or I would have thought of it before. That jolt started the works again."

"Are you going to hold up the conductor?" I asked jeeringly.

"Possibly, Little Bright Eyes; but all you have to do is to get aboard and leave the rest to me."

"I tell you, it's no use, Gus," moaned the star. "We are jointly reduced to the sum of four cents!"

"Don't worry about that, Julius," piped Pierpont. "I'm not going to squander the reserve fund on this car. Now look prosperous, try to imagine that you own the line and that I'm your financial secretary and not merely the man behind the bums."

THE car stopped. Gus stood respectfully at the step and ushered us aboard, while he paused on the platform.

"Conductor," he began in an excited voice, "did you see anything of a brace of tramps streaking it down the road as you came up?"

"No, sir. Why? What's the matter?"

"What's the matter?" echoed Gus vehemently. "Why, dodgast 'em! they held us up, cleaned us out! That's what they did! I'll have the authorities after them as soon as we get to the city! By gad, I will!" He was intensely angry. "It isn't the money we care about," he went on a trifle less hotly, "though Mr. Crimmins there," indicating Leffingwell—"you've heard of Crimmins, the great real estate magnate?"

The conductor wasn't quite sure, but he thought he had heard of Crimmins.

"Well," continued Gus, "that's him; the scrawny, middle-aged person with the bilious complexion, frock coat and sombrero. Unconventional as ——, he is, but kind to dumb beasts and warranted not to corrode or coerce. Well, Mr. Crimmins lost between five and six hundred dollars, and I suppose the rest of us between us gave up a couple of hundred. But, as I said, it isn't the money we care so much about—it's our watches and jewelry! I wouldn't have taken ten thousand dollars for that diamond ring those yeggs got off me. It was my dead wife's!"

The conductor was inclined to be sympathetic, but there was just a taint of suspicion in his voice as he asked. "What was you swells doin' out here, hoofin' it?"

Gus swallowed his Adam's apple and countered as follows:

"You see that distinguished-looking, spick and span, smart-Alec young fellow with the carrot-colored hair and stingy ears?" The conductor looked at me and nodded. "That's Rudolph Sminkers, junior member of the well-known firm of Grafley & Sminkers, contractors and builders. Mr. Crimmins was showing him over a piece of property he owns just beyond the crossroad back there, where he's planning to build a model suburban tenement. We came out in a motor, you know, but the steering-wheel snapped off just at the place where the spark-plug connects with the main carburetor—nasty place for a break; very difficult to get at—happened just as we were starting back. The chuffer's there now, trying to patch it up with a piece of wire."

"You can't depend on them automobiles, can you?" put in the conductor.

"Depend upon them?" snorted Gus. "Why I never went out in one of the —— things that it didn't bust a battery or foul its crank-case! I told Mr. Clutch—it's his car; he's the dumpish, greasy one with the mole on his nose; he's just a capitalist. Sort of male Hetty Green, mean as dirt, only gives his chuffer twenty-five dollars a week and makes him board himself! Yes, I told him his old car would break down, that it would be safer to drive out in Mr. Crimmins's landau; but he would have it his way. And now I wish to heaven we hadn't come at all, or had waited with the mechanic. That's what I wanted to do, but Mr. Crimmins had an important meeting of the board of directors of his bank to-night, so he couldn't wait. He'll be late as it is, confound it all!"

Gus paused, took out pencil and paper and prepared to make notes.

"Now, conductor, be good enough to give me your name, the number of your car, etc. I'll have to mail you"— this with an expansive smile—"carfare for the

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party to the city; and you may be sure that the same mail will bring you a little something in the way of remembrance for yourself," he added insinuatingly. "Mr. Crimmins is nothing if not affluent in these matters."

THE conductor, thoroughly convinced, impressed and obviously proud to render a service to such a bunch of capitalists, readily yielded up his name and the cryptic numbers of his clan; and we rode twelve luxurious miles, without fear and without reproach, into the city.

"Speak kindly to the conductor as you pass," admonished Gus, toward whom we had preserved an outward air of friendliness while nursing an inward storm of indignation.

Nevertheless we emulated his example as we disembarked at the barn where our car finished its run, making glad the conductor's heart with soft phrases and assurances of our bounteous regard after the smug manner of creditors and philanthropists.

"For a fact," said Gus, as we stopped to part under a street lamp, "I'm going to mail that fellow the price of our fares if I have to pawn my shirt."

"An honorable sentiment," remarked Leffingwell icily, "which is wholly incongruous with your treatment of your associates. I refer to the disparaging way you described us to the conductor."

"Yes," I supplemented. "Some one ought to punch your head."

"It isn't good taste, to say the least, to call the attention of a stranger to your friends' moles!" Browleigh blinked angrily.

"Verisimilitude! Verisimilitude!" contended Gus. "Those little touches gave my story the necessary ring of truth!"

"Unnecessary lies and defamation of character!" retorted Leffingwell.

Gus was hurt. "All right, all right. That's what I get for trundling you fellows home on my face." Then turning indignant, he went on, "If it hadn't been for my alert mendacity, you dodoes would be plodding it on your uppers miles from here now. You ought to be groveling to me, instead of roasting me for a little artistic pleasantry."

"Well," temporized Leffingwell, "I'm sure that we all feel much beholden to you, and for my poor part I'm willing to let my gratitude outweigh my grouch. I forgive you, Gus!"

So we all forgave him, shaking hands; and Browleigh, who had an aunt living somewhere in the neighborhood, bade us good-by and started off to find her. Leffingwell and Pierpont planned to descend upon the former's recent lodgings and I had some sentimental business that drew me in another direction.

"Rudolph," began Gus, taking my hand again, "you were green when we plucked you, but you've ripened in the conservatory of adversity. And I want to say to you, in the words of Monty Carlo, that some day you're going to make a big noise on the Rialto! I'm proud to have made your acquaintance and taken your money; and just as soon as we can collect a little salvage and dope out a fresh proposition, we'll let you in on it, won't we, Julius?"

"Naturally," assented Leffingwell, laying a hand on my shoulder. "I shall not forget you, my boy. As I said in the beginning, you have genius——"

"Put that in camphor," I interrupted, not unkindly. "Being nominated as genius of the outfit cost me five hundred hard-saved plunks. But don't think I hold that against you—not a bit! The operation was expensive but successful. The patient will recover, thank you, with his optics burnished up to X-ray penetration. But I warn you both, in all friendliness, don't bring me any proposition that won't stand the blood-test for specific gravity."

"It's a comfort to know you take it that way, my young philosopher," said Leffingwell with great satisfaction. "This little *contretemps* and our coöperative misfortunes have, I feel, bound us together with an indissoluble friendship; and, although the future is as yet uncertain, I am sure it holds for us, reunited, some rare good fortune. My boy, *aufwiedersehen!*"

He shook my hand again with genuine feeling.

"So long, old pal," said Gus gruffly, to hide his emotion, thumping me on the chest.

CHAPTER XIX

THE AWAKENING

THUS I parted from those engaging, honest rogues, and as I looked back at them, silhouetted against the lamplight, I had a sense of utter loneliness, as though I had bid farewell to the dearest comrades I

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had ever known. But, as I was purposely walking in the direction of Jeanne's habitation, my spirits resumed their wonted resiliency, thinking how sweet it was to know that her eye would brighten at the sight of me, to feel that I had but to speak the word and she would slip her hand in mine for keeps and ease my turgid heart with that soul-mate sympathy which resilvers the vagrant star of hope and spatters talcum on the sunburnt pores of tribulation.

Buoyed by such fond ruminations, I trod the pavements with increasing haste and impetuosity. A clock in a drug store told me that it was half-past nine as I turned the corner of the little street where Jeanne lived. It was a warm night. All along the block the inhabitants hung out of the windows and sprawled on the doorsteps. The houses were all of the same brand, like a string of paper-dolls cut out in manifold. Only a faded awning over the vestibule distinguished my leading lady's domicile from its neighbors.

As I approached I saw a couple of kids playing jacks on the doorsill, and the partially bald head of a man who was dozing, collarless, suspendered and slovenly at the down-stairs window.

Addressing myself to the elder of the kids, a girl who couldn't have been over seven years old, I asked if Miss De Angelus was at home.

The girl turned a knowing little face up to me, a face that was pretty, too, in an eery sort of way, in spite of its paleness.

"Are you the gen'l'man that's got her trunk-check?" she inquired.

I identified myself by producing said check and turning it over to her.

"Take those jacks out of your mouth, Tod!" she suddenly admonished, with a watchful eye on her diminutive playmate. At the same time she dived a hand into her stocking. "I've got the check for your trunk," the girl went on, whisking it from that sophisticated institution known as the Shank Safe Deposit & Garterkneed Trust. "She told me to give it to you."

I thanked her and added that I should like to see Miss De Angelus personally.

"She ain't home."

"But she'll be back soon, won't she?" I put the question a trifle anxiously.

"I guess not," smiled the girl, shaking her blond curls. "She's gotta a *good* job this time, with a movin' pixture show."

"A moving picture show?"

I gasped, horror-struck at the idea of Jeanne prostituting her dainty talents before a blushless biograph, and feeling as though I had caught Fate, the pickpocket, with her hand on my happiness. Well, I'd have Jeanne out of that beastly grind. I'd touch B. F. & J. M. McGowen for the price of her redemption, if I had to put up our matrimonial bonds for security.

"Where—where's the headquarters of the company?" I asked almost fiercely.

The girl didn't know, but she'd find out. She rose and shook the recumbent form at the window.

"Say, pop," she halloed, as though addressing the dumb, "this gen'l'man wants to know where he can find mama!"

FOR an instant the child's words beat incoherently about my ears. Then, suddenly, they sank in and their whole terrible significance exploded in my brain. Something heavy—I think it must have been my heart—dropped into the pit of my stomach and lay there palpitating in the most sickly fashion.

Dimly I saw the man at the window raise a weak, unshaven, pain-creased face, the gray face of failure—his forty years, I am sure, had discounted the dregs of ninety. Dimly, I say, I saw his face, and dimly I heard without comprehending his thickly spoken reply; for round and round my mind whirled a dizzy troupe of Jeannes in all their endearing moods.

At last the film ran out, leaving a wonderfully clear picture fixed upon the screen of my memory. It was Jeanne sitting beside me on the edge of a wood, in a mood of quaint and puzzling sadness, envying the lot of the irresponsible mother-cow that chewed her cud contentedly while her calf foraged for itself about the meadow. It was plain to me now that she had been thinking of her own responsibilities at home.

I understood what she had done with the few dollars she had fought for at Puddleboro; and I knew then that Fate was no jester, no mere pickpocket, but a brutal boy who had pinned Jeanne, the butterfly, to the wheel with the shard of necessity, and that she rode the wheel, not with the grim smile of the martyr, but with the braver, inextinguishable smile of the mother.

A dead calm of gloom, shot across now and again with zigzag stripes of pain, en-

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veloped me as I stumbled away whither I knew not and cared less. Self-pity I felt, but in small degree compared with the greater sum I felt for Jeanne. I was a little younger then. It was the first time that I had plumbed the abyss, and perhaps I magnified its depths. I thought I should never smile again, thinking that, between us, Jeanne and I had cornered the world's output of misery and taken an option on its tears.

So my sad little ego laid itself down beside me that night, pushing me to the wall side of the bed in Mrs. Murphy's boarding-house, and fell asleep, as the fattest little egoes often do without committing mayhem or otherwise annoying those emissaries of Morpheus who are delegated to laundry the bedraggled hearts of lovers.

IN THE chirp of the morning I was still sobered but not so sad as I thought I ought to be, my ego flat as a shadow and my appetite unimpaired. Fortitude, I told myself, must be my long suit.

Cogitating on the disorder of affinities and sniffing disrespectfully at the poor quality of mercy that a stingy providence vouchsafes the wounded of heart—a thin quality of mercy, strained through the cullender of Cupid the Cheat—I strolled, under the escort of habit, without realizing where I was bound, until I found myself thrusting a key into the office door of B. F. & J. M. McGowen.

On impulse, I entered. The place looked good to me. I even regarded the high stool fondly and gave the ink-spattered desk an affectionate pat. Without premeditation I threw open the windows and mechanically doffed my hat and coat. Custom carried me to the safe, and I felt a thrill as the iron doors yielded to the familiar combination. What in the suburbs of Satan, or the precincts of Paradise, inspired me I do not know; but I drew the once-despised cash-book from its lair, laid it tenderly on the desk, mounted the high stool and, with pen behind my ear, delved into its secrets. Entries there were in the crinkly hand of old B. F., but he had struck no balance since my red rule had scored the page.

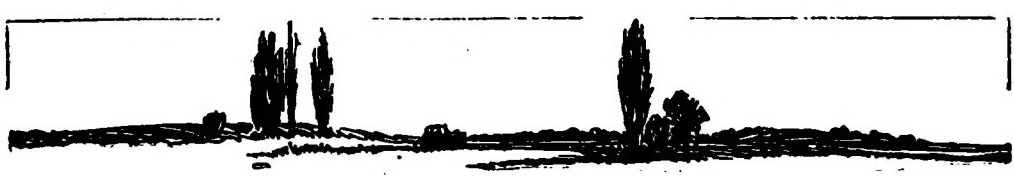
"That's a —— of a way to run a business!" said I, addressing myself to Addition, forgetful that I was butting in uninvited and unemployed.

I was about two-thirds down the last wriggly column, among a particularly maddening collection of sixes and sevens, when I heard the door open, and I knew by the shuffle of those feet that B. F. himself was crossing the threshold; but I did not dare look up or speak for fear of upsetting the equilibrium of my computation. I screwed my mind down on the job, yet I was aware that the senior member of the firm had passed back of me and entered the private office.

No sound interrupted me then; only the ticking of the big clock over the calendar played an accompaniment to the quick pulsations of my own heart as I set down the last figure and reached for the red ink pen.

At that instant I became conscious of a stir in the atmosphere. It was the boss pattering across the carpet toward my desk; but I pretended to be very busy putting scarlet borders at the bottom of the page, expecting every moment to be kicked off the stool. My panic was near hitting the screeching-point, when B. F. laid a supporting hand on the small of my back and leaning over my elbow, with spectacled eyes fixed on the page, asked casually,

"What's the balance, Smink?"



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Everybody's Magazine

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Mother Is First with the Child
Father Is First with the Law

If you were a judge, would you give a five year old child to the father, taking it away altogether from a mother just as good and equally well to do? The Supreme Court of New York says "Yes."

A boy is injured at his work. His father could go into court and get damages, but his father is dead. He is supporting his widowed mother. Can she go into court? Can she get damages? She cannot. She is only a mother. So goes the law of Pennsylvania.

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